

# BIG-LEAGUE ROOKIE



*Francis Wallace*

# BIG-LEAGUE ROOKIE

by FRANCIS WALLACE

Luke Coss, a raw kid from a coal mine town, had two qualities that mark a great athlete — he did the right thing instinctively and he played his best when the chips were down. He had set his goal early, and his goal was baseball. He didn't know whether a boy without even minor-league experience could come off the sand lots and make a big-league team, but if he ever was lucky enough to get a training camp try out, he intended to fight grimly for a place in baseball.

His chance did come and, scared and cold inside, he reported at the Florida camp of the Buffs. There he lived through days of nervous tension when he couldn't seem to do anything right, and nights when worry about the day's mistakes drove sleep away. A baseball joker, intent on turning him into a "character" for the sake of the laughs, almost shattered his morale, but the friendship of Old Hec Turner, the best shortstop in the league, restored it. Still Luke had to battle his own fears and desperations before he could reach his goal.

In *Big-League Rookie*, Francis Wallace, one of America's greatest sports  
(Continued on back flap)













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**BIG-LEAGUE  
ROOKIE**







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FRANCIS WALLACE

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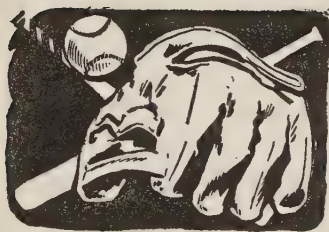
*To the other three members  
of the baseball writers' quartet —  
MANN, SMITH, VIDMER —  
a closed corporation*



BIG-LEAGUE  
ROOKIE







## CHAPTER

### I

The people on the big bus were tired from the ceaseless

motion, worn by the heat, and bored with their journey. So when the girl got on, there was an immediate stir of interest.

The girl was pretty and pert, a summer bloom of auburn hair, tanned skin, and a yellow linen dress.

Luke Coss gave her a lazy smile as she came down the aisle to the seat opposite. But she batted him down with her brown eyes that, impersonal and aloof, seemed to go through him without seeing him.

Luke grinned. He could pass for a roughneck, at that. He hadn't shaved or been out of his clothes for two days, and his heavy black hair probably looked as though it hadn't been combed for a week. His arms were brawny; his thick neck and powerful shoulders bulged against the seams of a T-shirt no longer quite white. His face, as strong and tough-looking as the rest of him, was all bones and skin and deep lines that looked like scars.

The girl carried a bag on a strap over her shoulder, a newspaper, and a magazine. She opened the magazine and retired to its pages as though she were a princess in her private coach. She thought pretty well of herself,

Luke decided, grinning again, but she had plenty of reason. About nineteen, he guessed, his own age; not too tall or too short, a sassy-type redhead with turned-up nose.

He stretched his long legs, yawned, closed his eyes, tried to catch a nap. They didn't have to hit him on the head with a ball bat. Anyhow, she was just another girl who looked sharp because she was the only young one around at the moment.

The magazine rustled after a while and he knew she was through with it. He partly opened his eyes.

She was fixing her face. That was an old trick too, looking in the compact to see who was watching her. He could see her eyes in the mirror and they seemed to be giving him a sort of smile. He started to return the smile, then held it up. He'd had that one pulled on him too. She wasn't going to egg him on and then let him have the ball bat and make him feel foolish.

He stretched his arms, yawned again, and turned back to the scenery. He heard the compact snap. When he looked across the aisle she was giving him the back of her neck as she read the newspaper. Even the back of her neck was cute.

Luke knew he had a wonderful way with girls — the wrong way. This one was mad at him and they had not even met. Just as well, he thought. Girls only mixed a guy up in his head and he was going to have to keep a straight head on his shoulders. He was getting the break of a lifetime — a big-league chance — and he was going to make the most of it.

Four more hours and this trip would be over. They'd look at his shiny new bag and say to themselves, "Another rookie!" Luke wouldn't blame them — it was a laugh.



He laughed at himself.

The girl turned quickly and scorched him with a look hotter than the weather. Then she gave him the back of her neck once more.

Luke didn't blame her. First she thought he'd yawned in her face — now she thought he'd laughed at her. He hadn't really done either; but if he tried to explain, he'd be sure to get it messed up. Girls always managed to mess him up, one way or another. He was like Johnny Hill; he just didn't understand girls.

So forget it. He couldn't afford to get messed up; the thing to do was not to fool around with girls — beginning with this one. She was just somebody who'd got on his bus. He had never seen her before and would never see her again. Hello, and so long.

He turned back to the scenery. It was because of the scenery that he had taken the bus. The Buffs were paying his expenses and he could have come by train, riding first-class. He had never been on a Pullman, had never been more than fifty miles from home in his life. But traveling by bus he would see more of the country.

He'd grown tired of scenery. He closed his eyes and his mind gradually drifted back to his home and to Johnny Hill and to the people and events responsible for his being what he was and where he was — a raw rookie, without even minor-league experience, a kid just out of high school, on his way to the spring training camp of a big-league baseball club, the famous Buffs.

He still couldn't quite believe it.

As the bus rolled along, Luke opened his eyes now and then, and every time he opened them he glanced over at the girl. Not that she really mattered. He just didn't like people to be mad at him and he didn't like to be mad

at people.

"It never costs anything to make a friend," Johnny Hill had often told him, "but it might cost plenty to make an enemy."

Luke was surprised at the way Johnny's sayings had been coming back to him since he'd left home. He knew he shouldn't be surprised, because he'd been around Johnny Hill almost since he could remember. Johnny was his best friend.

He was a simple soul, old Johnny, who asked little of life and gave much. He had begun to drag one leg a little and to walk with a hunching sort of movement — probably caused by the weight for many years of a mail sack on his shoulder. A boy or a dog usually trailed along, for kids and dogs — and grownups too — like to trail a happy man. Week after week Luke had trailed him.

Johnny lived with his sister, who was as fat as he was wiry. Old Marg, as everybody called her, kept a little neighborhood store which, open at all hours, was a handy place to pick up ice cream, candy, soft drinks, bread, milk, and staple package goods. Johnny always said Marg was married to her store and Marg said Johnny was married to his mail and his baseball. They never missed kids, Luke thought, because kids were always around them. He had been one of those kids.

Luke had had a lot of fun listening to Old Marg. Whenever she got started on one of her long ones, Johnny would laugh and say, "This is where I came in, Luke," and get up and leave. Marg would say that was just Johnny's excuse to get out of working around the store, and that in turn would usually start her off on Johnny and his baseball. She made Johnny out to have been quite a star, which, Johnny chuckled, was stretching the truth

a bit. In time Luke got an idea of Johnny's real story. It was not as exciting a story as Marg told, but it was a good tale at that.

Johnny's world as a kid, Luke gathered, had been a different world from the world of a kid today. There were no radios, automobiles, movies, and television — not even basketball or track. He'd played halfback for the high-school football team because he was fast, but his real love had always been baseball. He'd played shortstop and had been a pretty good hitter. He particularly liked to hit at the high ones because he seemed to get more wood on the ball.

The bus came to a stop at a railroad crossing and then crept over the tracks. Luke didn't feel the jouncing tracks; his mind was still far back at home. Johnny Hill, he was remembering, was always getting in a little sermon, like the day he'd said there were only a few important things a boy had to make up his mind about — his job, the girl he was going to marry, and his religion. Johnny had never included politics, saying that kids should wait to make up their minds until they were coming on to an age to vote. But religion, he said, was something that couldn't wait; the quicker a kid got that, the better, but he'd never go wrong with the kind he got from his mother. As for girls, Johnny had sort of missed out. Anyhow, he said, it was the girls who usually chose the men, and none of them had chosen him.

But Johnny insisted he'd been lucky about his job. He'd always worked at something for spending money — all the kids did in his time — selling papers, delivering telegraph messages, anything to make a penny. But the job he'd always liked best was helping around the post office; and when he'd graduated from high school there'd been a

regular job waiting for him.

From high-school baseball Johnny had gone to what might now be called semipro ball. There were independent teams in every town, and the one that was best usually played the best from other towns, and sometimes even got to go against big-league clubs that would drop off for exhibition games, usually on jumps between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, to pick up a few dollars expense money.

That was how Johnny Hill had come to play against the Buffs. When he spoke of the Buffs, he always seemed to speak in capital letters: THE BUFFS. He'd made Luke Coss think of THE BUFFS in capital letters.

The bus came to a halt at a rest stop. Half an hour back Luke hadn't noticed a railroad crossing, and now he was unaware of the stop. He was on his way to a big-league camp for a tryout and Johnny Hill was the person who had made it possible. Johnny seemed to be with him right there in the bus and Johnny's warm, earnest voice seemed to be in his ears.

Johnny had always been partial to the Buffs, but there hadn't been any doubt about his loyalty on the great day when his town team, the Atlantics, had played the Buffs in an exhibition game. The Atlantics was his home team, and that settled that. The Atlantics had never really figured on beating the Buffs, of course, but they'd tried their best; and Johnny always said when a man or boy tried his best, he slept easy afterward.

"Perk Higgins was pitching for us," Johnny would say, "and he held them to twelve hits and four runs. They only beat us 4-2." It always hurt him a little because new kids hearing the story for the first time had never even heard of the old Atlantics.

Al Hartford, the Buff manager, had come to Johnny after the game. "What's your name, young fellow?"

"Johnny Hill."

Mr. Hartford had shaken hands. "Get in touch with me this winter; you might make a ballplayer."

The kids always stared when Johnny told the story and there'd be a silence. Then Johnny would say, "I never did."

"Why, Johnny?" somebody would ask.

"I was just plain scared. I lost my big chance because I was too scared to take a chance."

"I'd be scared too, Johnny."

"That's no good; never be scared. When you get your chance, take it. Even if you are scared, take it anyhow. Any dumb guy can bump his head against a wall if he's not afraid. You might say a dumb kid like that had guts, but when a kid who is afraid to bump his head does it anyhow — for a good reason, mind you — that's real courage."

Luke, shifting his seat in the bus, smiled to himself as he remembered the first time he'd heard the story. He was just a little kid, and he'd asked Johnny, "But why should a kid bump his head against a wall?"

Johnny had smiled. "I meant if there was something that he should do, and was afraid to do but he still did — see what I mean?"

"Like being afraid to hit a fast ball?"

"That's a good example. What made you think of it?"

"Because I'm afraid of speed."

Some of the other kids had protested they were not afraid of speed.

"Well, I was," Johnny told them, "even though I got two hits that day. That's the reason I never tried to make



the Buffs. Up in the majors the pitchers really throw that ball. That's what's wrong with a lot of people — they're afraid to try a lot of things they really could do. I could always hit the high, hard ones, but I was still afraid of big-league pitching."

Luke had said: "I think I get it. Thanks, Johnny."

That was the day, Luke remembered, that Johnny began to take an interest in him. The next day Johnny had gone to the field where the smaller kids played.

Somehow Luke, who always played shortstop, knew he had caught Johnny's interest. He could field, and throw, and run, and hit the dinky little curves, but he had always been afraid of speed. But this day, with Johnny watching, he'd stood up there and faced it. The third time at bat he'd lined one over second; and when he reached first, he'd turned and grinned at Johnny Hill. Johnny had winked back at him and their friendship had begun.

But not until two days ago, when Johnny had put him on the bus, had the letter carrier told what he'd really thought that day.

"I always had a kind of a secret dream, Luke. I always thought that eventually I'd see a kid who had the right stuff in him, and that when I did I'd see that he took the chance I threw away." Then Johnny had said: "Now you're getting your chance, Luke. I know you're never going to be afraid, like I was."

The only thing wrong with this, Luke thought, was that he was afraid. The nearer the bus rolled to the town where he was to get off, the more afraid he was becoming.

He sneaked another look at the girl, but she had forgotten apparently that he was there. He went back to his thoughts, the pleasant thoughts of Johnny Hill and home.





## CHAPTER

### 2

Luke remembered the first day he'd gone around the mail route with Johnny. Johnny let him take letters up the high steps of the houses, but watched to see that he delivered them properly. Johnny used to tell him that he was too sober for a kid, and by and by he began to talk to Johnny about his troubles.

His father, a coal miner, had returned from World War I with gas-weakened lungs. He'd gone back to the mines, and the gas, the coal dust, or both, had gotten him. His mother received a pension, and had a job in a store, but there was only enough money for them to get along. He wanted someday to take care of her, but every time he talked of going into the mines she worried.

"Why the mines?" Johnny had asked that day. "You should be a ballplayer; ballplayers make good money and are out in the open air."

Luke, after his heart had slowed down a little, had said he was afraid he wasn't going to be big enough.

"Don't you worry about that," Johnny had said. "Ballplayers don't have to be too tall — especially shortstops. They have to get down into the dirt after them."

"Slat's Marion's tall."

"Yes." Johnny never tried to argue away a fact.

"That gives him reach, doesn't it?"

"It helps, Luke. But then he also has to bend down farther. And the big thing's speed — quick starting. And instinct. You get in front of that ball and you won't need so much reach. Old Honus Wagner wasn't too tall, and he was the best."

"You're tall."

Johnny laughed. "Don't compare me with the big-leaguers."

"You could have been if —" Luke stopped.

"If I hadn't been afraid," Johnny said quietly. "Don't you ever forget that, Luke. Anyhow, how old are you, son?" That was the day he began calling Luke "son."

"Eleven."

"I never really started to grow till I was fifteen. Here, scoot this letter up to Miss Ellison."

Luke, shifting in his bus seat, smiled. Miss Ellison was an old-maid schoolteacher, kind of pretty, and the married women along the route always teased Johnny about her being after him. Now, though Luke doubted it, he hoped Miss Ellison and Johnny would someday get together. Aside from his mother, Miss Ellison had done more for him than any other woman in town.

It had begun that first day he'd scooted the mail up to her. "I see you have a new helper, Johnny," Miss Ellison called down from the porch.

"Yes — my old legs won't carry the mail much longer."

"Why, Johnny Hill — you're young yet!"

Johnny just laughed and kept on going; but after that, Luke noticed, Miss Ellison was usually waiting on her porch when they came around with the mail in the late afternoons.

Another day she said, "Luke's not so serious as he was, Johnny — but then, who could be serious around you?"

Johnny dodged that one too. Luke had begun to suspect that Johnny'd been dodging for years, not giving the girls much chance. "Is he smart in school?"

"He could be. Let's work on that."

They did start to work on that. Luke hadn't liked it at first, for few kids really like to study; but Miss Ellison kept reporting to Johnny on whatever study he was down in and he would have to report at the store and work evenings in the back room.

From that it had been only a step to helping out when business was rushing. At first he just got all the ice cream he could eat, but after he began waiting on trade, Old Marg put him on a regular salary, with regular hours and time out for study. He began to buy his own clothes.

He finished eighth grade at the head of his class and Miss Ellison wanted to have a little party at her house for him and for Johnny, just the three of them. But Johnny said the Buffs were playing in Pittsburgh that night and he had two tickets. Luke, he explained, was going out for the high-school team the next year and was someday going to be a Buff.

Miss Ellison had smiled. "Are you afraid of me, Johnny?" she'd asked.

"Miss Ellison, you don't look like you'd bite anybody." Johnny moved on to the next house.

Luke caught up with him, his face beaming. "Gee, Johnny, are we really going to see the Buffs?"

"Sure. I've been planning it a long time. You need some fun. You should go to parties now and then."

Luke remembered what he'd told Johnny Hill that day. "I guess I might as well tell you, Johnny. I just won't

have time for girls. I have to take care of my mother. Until I get her a house and she can quit work I'm just not going to fool around with girls."

"That's a fine ambition, Luke, but don't wait too long — look at me."

"Miss Ellison don't think you're too old. *Are you afraid of her, Johnny?*"

"Here," Johnny had said, "take this up to Mrs. Davies."

They'd gone to Pittsburgh on the bus. The seats were back of third base, where they could study the shortstops. In the seventh inning they'd moved upstairs, right back of home plate, to watch the pitches come in. They'd had a lot of fun trying to guess the pitches. A batter, Johnny explained, could try to guess and get set for what was coming, which was all right if he guessed right; but if he were wrong, he could be caught out of position.

"Stand up there and be ready for whatever comes up," Johnny said. "Follow that ball from the time it leaves the pitcher's hand until you get the wood on it. Don't look at anything else. I read where Hornsby once said he could almost see the ball hit the bat."

"Gee! He must have had good eyes."

"The best. Watch your eyes, Luke. Here comes Hec Turner. Watch how he looks 'em over. I'll bet he walks."

Hec Turner walked. "He never hits at the bad ones, Luke. I don't want you to have any bad habits they'll have to break you of when you get to the Buffs."

Watching Hec Turner, Luke had felt awed. "I'll never be good enough, Johnny."

"You just make up your mind you're going to — and you will. You're that kind of boy."

"But, gee — how're we going to do it?" The "we" had been unconscious.

"Never you mind about *that*. They look big and fast to you now; but when you finish high school, you'll be as big as they are, and the pitches won't seem so fast." Then Johnny had added, with more fervor in his voice than Luke had ever heard: "I don't know just how we'll do it, but we will. The one thing we're not going to be is *afraid*."

The bus made a lunch stop and Luke was the first one off. He went directly to the washroom, and while he was shaving, his thoughts kept running through the school years — Johnny Hill and Miss Ellison helping him in many ways and his mother's job at the store beginning to show on her. The town had always thought of him as a boy with one parent, but he knew now that all through those years there were three parents — a letter carrier, a teacher, and his mother.

He came from the washroom and took a stool at the counter, and then there was only time for a sandwich. On the way out he passed the redhead. Conscious of his cleanup, he was prepared to give her some notice, but she was still playing princess.

Back in the bus his thoughts returned to Johnny as though they had never strayed for a moment to dally with a redhead. War was a terrible thing, Johnny always said, and the only good thing to come out of it was the American Legion baseball program. Johnny was a legionnaire from World War I, and because he was the number one baseball man of the town, he'd been put in charge of the Legion program. Softball and football had almost pushed baseball out of the picture and the high school had dropped the game. Johnny started to make things hum, and finally the high school had put baseball back. And Johnny had said, "Luke, here's where you start rolling."

Luke knew that's where he had started rolling. He'd



made the freshman team as a regular, and by the time he was a junior he was also playing on an American Legion team.

Little by little Johnny had let him see he had it all figured out. Old Hec Turner had been playing shortstop for the Buffs for a long time, but now he was complaining of aches and pains and saying that each year would be his last. But he was still hitting around .300 and could be found anywhere from deep short to behind second base. But Johnny figured he would have to give up sometime, about four years from now perhaps.

That, Luke remembered, was when Johnny really started to get excited.

"Luke," he'd said, talking fast, "here's your program. One more year of high school and Legion ball and I'll take you to Buff Field for a graduation present and have you signed up. Two years in the minors — that's all you'll need — and you'll be with the Buffs at nineteen."

Luke had believed it; Johnny Hill had made him believe it. Hadn't Mel Ott gone to the Giants when he was sixteen?

And then had come football trouble.

Luke, playing with the high-school eleven, was almost as good as he was at baseball. Johnny had been uneasy about football, but the team hadn't amounted to much and the games hadn't been too slam-bang. But toward the end of Luke's sophomore-year football season, he was a powerhouse weighing 185 pounds, and a speedy back named Pesky O'Dare suddenly found himself and the line found itself. All at once the town went football-mad. Next season the team would surely make a state ranking; Luke was sure to get a good college offer and go on to play pro football.

Johnny had become alarmed.

"Stay out of football next year," he'd begged. "Next year's going to be rough. If you get a broken ankle or a broken arm, or one of those football knees, your baseball future'll be gone. Stay out, Luke."

The bus made another stop and Luke saw a man running toward it with a suitcase. The man was still panting when he climbed aboard. The bus was filling up and the man with the suitcase took a seat alongside the redhead.

*Lucky guy*, Luke thought wryly, and wondered what would have happened had he dropped into the seat beside the girl. Oh, well — His shoulders shrugged and he was back with Johnny Hill.

When he hadn't gone out for football, the football-mad town had begun to talk. Football was going to be knock-down and drag-out this year and he was afraid. That stung. Grim-lipped, he took the criticism. He had given Johnny Hill his word. And then his mother had talked to him and told him that the man she worked for was one of the high-school team's boosters and that he was beginning to ask her questions.

Luke had never before told her of his ambition to buy her a home and of how baseball could make this possible. She put her arms around him and kissed him and cried a little. And a little later she told him that Johnny had been almost a father to him and to follow his advice.

The next day he'd walked the afternoon mail delivery with Johnny. It had been a long time since he'd gone over the route, but his talk with his mother was in his mind and he wanted to talk to Johnny. Yet he couldn't get words out. Johnny went up the steps of Miss Ellison's house and he walked a little ahead and stopped.

"Nice day, Miss Ellison," Johnny said.



"Come back here, Johnny Hill," Miss Ellison had called. "I've got something to say to you, and stop fumbling with those letters and listen to me. It's about Luke."

Johnny had stopped fumbling. "What about Luke?"

"You're standing in his way. Luke wants to play football. He never told me that, but I know. And there's a bigger reason why he should than your old baseball. The boy's got a mind. He should go to college and have it developed. The only way he can go to college is by playing football, and becoming what the boys call a 'big wheel' and getting an athletic scholarship. I'm not going to see him sacrificed to your selfish ambition to get a bow by sending a boy to your old Buffs."

Luke remembered he had felt sorry for Johnny and had started to walk away. Miss Ellison had gone back into the house and Johnny overtook him. Luke would also remember Johnny's steps. They'd been slow steps.

"You heard what she said?" Johnny asked after a while.

Luke nodded. He didn't say a word.

And after a while Johnny had said: "I guess you'd better play football, Luke. It's all right."



## CHAPTER

### 3

So Luke had played football and had enjoyed it. But it hadn't been all right — not for Johnny Hill. Luke knew Johnny worried about injuries. He hadn't been surprised to see Johnny go along with football, helping the coach, helping with equipment, running out with the water bucket. Johnny wanted to be around if he did get hurt. Luke had seen the agony in Johnny's eyes the first time he was knocked out, and had seen the deeper despair the day his knee had buckled on him. He'd felt pretty low himself. A bad knee might mean no more football, no college, no baseball — nothing but a life in the mines and his mother's worry.

But the knee had turned out to be nothing worse than a banged-up nerve. The doctor had massaged it in the dressing room and he'd come back to score the winning touchdown on four straight plows through the middle. By the time the next kickoff was made he'd forgotten the knee, but the other team hadn't. One of their players gave it an intentional twist.

Across the aisle the redhead sneezed, but Luke did not hear her. He was living again the moments following that intentional twist. He'd blown his top and slugged the

player who'd wrenched his leg — had slugged him right out there in the open field — and there'd been a near riot. And after the game Johnny had looked like a man carrying all the worries in the world.

"I never before saw you lose your temper like that," he moaned. "You can't do it, son; you just can't. It's all right to be a scrapper when you have to be, but in the big leagues you can't afford to lose your head. They have smart 'jockeys' up there, and once they find they can get under your skin they'll ride you in every game. Watch it, for it can get you into trouble. A mad ballplayer isn't a good ballplayer; he's doing too much feeling and not enough thinking."

After that Luke had "watched it." In the spring he'd turned out for baseball.

"You're better than ever," Johnny had told him. "You'll be ready."

Then came senior year and more football. The town joyously predicted state ranking — Luke Coss for power, and Pesky O'Dare for speed, and a good line. Luke was sure to get a college offer and probably make All-American. And then pro football. The town had it all figured out.

Johnny Hill had it figured out too, and didn't like the sum total.

"Son," he complained, "they're going to think of you as a football star and forget your baseball. Football gets spread all over the sports pages, but you hit .400 next spring and who'll know it outside of this locality? And these here girls are worrying me. They're giving you too many cow eyes. Oh, I know I told you to get out and go to some parties, but you get yourself latched to one of those girls and it'll be too bad. The responsibilities of

married life are not ideal for a young ballplayer.”

Luke, swaying to the motion of the bus, began to chuckle. He didn't think any of the girls had exactly made eyes at him. That was Johnny's imagination. Where girls were concerned he had a genius for doing and saying the wrong thing. He was still batting .000 in the Girl League.

His mind drifted back to senior football. Sure, the town had had it all figured out — college offer, All-American, pro football. And then the bubble had burst. In the first game Pesky O'Dare was hurt and lay for weeks with most of his body in a cast. Without him the football team wasn't the same; it missed his daring spirit and his flashy speed. A powerhouse back couldn't carry the burden alone. A team that was expected to win state ranking became lost in the rankings. Saturday after Saturday Luke played himself almost to exhaustion and became what one sports writer called “a heroic figure in defeat.”

Looking out the bus window, Luke felt a wry taste in his mouth. The world hadn't been interested in heroic defeat. It had no longer been interested in him. The team lost most of its games by close scores, but it lost. There were no “offers” from colleges. These went to the boys who had starred on winning teams and made All-Valley or All-State.

Looking back, Luke knew he had grown up during senior year. It had been a shock to work as he'd worked on the football team, to give everything he had and to find it not enough. It had been tough to be overlooked while other boys received college offers — boys he'd played against, boys he honestly knew were not so good as he was, but boys who had played on winning teams.

It was rough to have big dreams of college and pro football, to be taken to the mountaintops and shown the

green valleys, and then, all of a sudden, to have the mountain pulled out from under him and to wind up, not down on the ground, but under the ground in a dark mine. For he'd been sure, after he knew he'd lost his college chance, that that was to be his future, burrowing in the dark, two miles in, where nature had made the coal ages ago, where his father had worked years ago. Deep down in the beautiful hills, without hope or future.

Yes, he'd grown up. It had all been a shock, but he'd taken it. He was a man in size, a big man. After the football season he stopped being a boy in his head.

"You're beginning to find out about life," Johnny Hill had said, "and sometimes it's a painful experience. There's still baseball, son, which is where I think you rightly belong. In June we're going to see the Buffs again; after the game I'll take you into the dressing room to see Denny Hays." Denny Hays was the Buffs manager.

Luke hadn't been particularly interested. What was the use of building up to another big letdown? The chances were they wouldn't get into the dressing room. A big-league manager would have plenty to do without wasting time on nice old guys and high-school kids. Johnny seemed to think everything would be all right if only they saw Denny Hays. Probably they'd be told that a boy had to get a reputation, to serve time in the minor leagues like almost all the other big-leaguers had done. By now, Luke thought, he was more grown up in his head in some ways than Johnny.

The bus rolled past a school and at once he was reliving graduation night. At least the school knew what he'd done in football and baseball and they gave him a big hand when he received his diploma. He was an honor student, thanks to Johnny and Miss Ellison. He was going



back to his seat with his diploma when a commotion broke out in the audience. His mother had fainted.

They got her home — Johnny, Miss Ellison, a doctor, and the man for whom she worked. It looked as though she had lived for this night and the excitement had been too much for her heart. The doctor ordered a long rest. The store would pay her salary and have easier work for her when she came back.

The bus stopped again and a small boy got on, took a dollar bill from his pocket with a great show of dignity, and paid his fare. He came along the aisle and the red-head smiled at him. Well, Luke thought, she was somewhat human at that. And someday that kid would come out of school and be looking for a job.

For him, Luke recalled, there'd been no looking, no choice. He'd gone into the mines and, after a while, his mother had recovered and gone back to work. He tried not to see the worry that grew in her eyes.

Then the United Mine Workers organized a baseball league. As the town's Mr. Baseball, Johnny Hill had something to do with that too. Each mine had its team, and the league was divided into two sections. Come August, the sectional champions would play for the big title.

Johnny had said: "Get into this, son. You never know what's going to happen next. Keep up your game."

Luke played with his mine team — it was something to do. For a while it continued to be just that, something to do. Then the race in his section grew tight and suddenly he found himself giving everything he had. Through July he hit an amazing .465. Almost singlehanded he brought his team toward the finals. Slowly his mind had been making itself up; his mother's heart couldn't stand the worry. After the finals he'd quit the mines. What he'd do was for

the future; he'd find something.

The remaining days were grim; mine people have an idea about such things, a superstition. He'd never feared the mines for himself, but the superstition hit him when he went in on the last day. It just might be the last day. It stayed with him all day long. He'd never forget the man-trip coming out, a growing fear of even the last ticking seconds. Then came the relief of seeing the tube of daylight become a widening circle and at last stepping out into the air. His mother was waiting when he walked into the house. She put her arms around him and neither of them said a word. He knew then why men and boys who had gone from the mines into World War II had not gone back to the mines on their return. They'd had a new feeling of the precious gift of life.

Luke lived again the feeling of liberation he'd taken to the field next day for the championship game. He felt as free and exhilarated as a bird loosed from a cage. That was the way he played, the way he fielded, ran, threw, and hit.

He got four for four, and one of the four was a home run. He drove in seven of his team's eight runs, and all eight were needed to win. The band had played his old school song and there'd been picture-taking he hadn't expected. The governor of the state had been a guest and he'd been photographed with the governor. Jimmy Duncan, the union district vice-president, had staged a safety meet of the first-aid teams from the various mines, and the newspaper cameramen had insisted that he pose with Jimmy Duncan.

Then there had been one more picture, with Johnny Hill and a stranger he'd never seen before.

Johnny had made the introduction: "Luke, shake hands



with Dave Barton, the Buff scout."

Barton stuck out his hand. "Luke, I'd like to have a talk with you and your mother."

Luke relived that scene with a lump in his throat. Old Johnny Hill, seeing a dream come true, had nearly cried.

The bus was pulling into the town where he was getting off. Johnny Hill had done his part; now it was up to a kid from the mines named Luke Coss to do his. The lump was still in his throat.

The redheaded girl was getting off too. For some reason that made Luke laugh. Why, he didn't know. Somehow, it seemed funny that she should have frozen him during the ride and now be getting off with him. He saw her shoulders move and knew she thought he had laughed at her again.

He stood up, bag in hand, and the bus turned a corner and the bag swung against her. She flashed him a red-headed look that, coming from a man, would have given him restless fists. But she was a girl and he gave her a "Sorry" and a grin. The grin seemed to make her angrier.

Old Luke the heartbreaker, Luke thought wryly. He certainly had a way with girls. One look and it was hate at first sight. Hello and so long!

The bus came to a stop. The grin faded and the hand that held the bag stiffened. There was now the matter of a little business with the Buffs. All at once Luke was conscious of the odds against a kid with only high-school experience and sorry that Johnny had ever thought of it.



## CHAPTER

### 4

The small boy, also getting off here, dropped a dime on the bus steps and Luke had to wait until the dime was found. He stepped to the ground and looked about him. Plenty of men in light tropical clothing, plenty of women in gay dresses. But none of them appeared to be seeking an unknown player who was to get a tryout with the Buffs. Nobody glanced at him except the taxi drivers and they only glanced once. He didn't, he suspected, look like taxi money. He walked to the nearest cab.

"How far to the hotel?"

"Which one?"

Luke's mind went blank; he couldn't remember. "Where the Buffs stay."

"About a mile." The driver opened the taxi door and, after another look at Luke, closed it again.

"Which way?"

The man pointed and Luke started walking.

He heard the driver say, "Another shoe-box rookie," and the laughter that followed the words. He felt like going back and asking what was so funny, but he kept on walking. He could afford to get off on the wrong foot here even less than he could afford to take a cab.

He felt out of place in his dark suit; but he had left home in March snow — and had had an argument with his mother and Miss Ellison at that because he hadn't taken his topcoat. His new bag wasn't very heavy. He was traveling light, just in case. If he came back home in a hurry, the wolves at least couldn't kid him about taking a trunk. If he needed more clothes, he could always send for them.

This town wasn't much bigger than his own coal-mine town, but it was altogether different. The street was wider, the buildings were newer, everything was *clean* — no coal dust. Two girls walked by in bathing suits, looking pretty much like girls in his home town last summer, but these girls snickered. That was different. The girls didn't laugh at him back home even if it was hello and good-by.

The hotel was a spiffy one, much fancier than the ones he'd stopped at on football trips — the only trips he'd ever made. His mother had always spent her summer vacations working around the house and he'd helped her. Thoughts of his mother brought thoughts of the mines and the cold spot of dread in his stomach warmed. This was his chance and he couldn't miss it. At least it was a chance. He swung through the lobby and ignored the bellhops who tried to snatch his bag.

The clerk made it easy. "Buffs?"

"Yes, sir." Luke gave his name.

The clerk checked a list and shook his head. "Sorry, Mr. Coss; there doesn't seem to be a reservation."

Luke mistered him right back. "There's got to be, Mister. I've got a contract."

The clerk's smile was pleasant. "That's fine. I'm sure everything will be straightened out when Mr. Wedge comes back from the ball park."

"Who's Mr. Wedge?"

"The club secretary."

"Is Mr. Barton here?"

"They're all at the ball park and won't be back for two hours. Why don't you check your bag and take a cab out?" The clerk touched a bell on his desk and a bellhop responded instantly.

Luke didn't like the idea of giving up his bag; particularly, he didn't like the idea of taking a cab to the park.

"How far is the park?"

"About three miles."

"Which way?"

"I wouldn't advise walking," said the clerk.

Luke took a cab. The driver wound through streets and park and he began to suspect the guy was taking him the long way round to run up the fare. When the meter passed a dollar and a half, he said, "When I get two bucks' worth, stop."

The driver laughed. "Take it easy, bud." Two more turns and he added, "Here we are, Slugger."

*Here we are*, Luke thought, *with seventy cents left in our pocket*. He had refused to let Johnny Hill spend his money on another Buff game and Johnny had been hurt; now he wished he had taken some of the money Johnny had wanted to lend him. A foreign country — for such the town seemed — where nobody had ever heard of him, and people who didn't know him laughed! And seventy cents! The seventy cents in his pocket brought back some of the cold cramp.

The gate of the park was open and he walked in. At least he didn't have to pay his way into practice.

The park was disappointing. The stand wasn't much larger than the one at home and only a handful of people

were in the seats. About twenty players were working around the infield and outfield. Luke had expected to recognize most of them from the pictures Johnny had all over the walls of his room, but he didn't recognize any of the faces. If it weren't for the lettering across their chests, he might have thought he had come to the wrong place.

*Perhaps, he thought, I have.*

A wild throw came toward him. He stabbed it with his right hand and whistled it back with plenty of zip. The ball felt good.

Two big men, circling the grounds, jogged toward him. These players he did recognize.

"Sign him up," one of them yelled.

"Quiet, Mousey," the other frowned. "He might be a shortstop. I dreamed last night the guy who'd take my job would walk in here today."

Luke grinned. "How many years have you been saying that, Mr. Turner?"

"See, Mousey, he even knows me."

The two pulled up, panting and perspiring. They looked fat which, Luke guessed, was why they were jogging about in rubber jackets; and they seemed glad of an excuse to stop.

"Mr. Wedge around?" Luke asked.

"I refuse to be a pallbearer at my own funeral," Hec Turner moaned. "You tell him, Mouse."

"Maybe he's a pitcher," Mousey Maynard protested. Luke knew Mousey's won-and-lost record, his earned-run average. He was one of the best pitchers in the league.

"Hey!" called a familiar voice. "You two meat wagons take off the lard."

"I don't have to take it off now," Hec Turner yelled

back. "My successor just arrived."

Dave Barton came across the grass. "Hello, Luke. Have any trouble getting here?"

"Hello, Mr. Barton." The cold spot in Luke was warm again. Shaking hands with the scout who had signed him was like shaking hands with Johnny or somebody from home.

Hec Turner feigned horror. "Don't tell me he *is* a shortstop!"

Barton nodded. "He surely is — you haven't just been kidding. He'll take your job if you don't get rid of that fat. This is Luke Coss, the coal-mine kid I was telling you about."

"Should I start packing now?" Turner asked. But the hand he held out to Luke had a solid, sincere grip. He resumed his sweating-it-off jog and Mousey Maynard jogged off with him.

"Get fixed up at the hotel?" Barton asked. Luke told him what had happened and he nodded. "The clerk would have put you in a room, but they're crowded. Wedge'll fix you up. How's my old friend, Johnny?"

"Great," Luke said fervently.

"Why didn't he come to camp with you? We'd see that he was fixed up."

"Well —" Luke did not want to say that Johnny wouldn't want to be around if he were shipped home.

Barton understood. "You're sure to be here for a few weeks; I want them to get a good look at you. Johnny's got a baseball head and I think he's figured it right. There'll be a spot here one of these days and you should be the boy."

An electric tingle ran through Luke. "If I'm not, Mr. Barton, it won't be because I didn't try."



"Dave, Luke; not Mr. Barton. Well, let's get you into a uniform."

Barton left him at the clubhouse with Willie Herman, the trainer, a soft-spoken little man who had been a hard hitter in the prize ring before transferring his talents and affections to the Buffs.

Luke put the uniform on slowly, as though it were any ordinary uniform. But it wasn't that. This was the end of a dream — Johnny Hill's dream. Johnny should have been wearing a uniform like this years ago.

Hec Turner came in sweating. "Where's your glove, kid?"

Luke said, "In my bag at the hotel."

"Here, take mine." The veteran shortstop gave him a wink, a pat on the back, a shove toward the door.

Moving into the outfield, Luke heard the trainer's voice. "Get on the scales, Hec. If five pounds haven't come off, out you go again."

Luke, glowing with a quick liking for Hec Turner, passed out of earshot and did not hear the dialogue that followed.

"That might be the kid, Willie," Hec said seriously.

"He's big, Hec; look at that back. He's got a fighter's face."

"Wait till you see him throw. Yes, sir; that just might be the kid."

"Yeh," the trainer hooted, "in about ten years. Are you getting on those scales?"

Stiff, sore-muscled, and sleepy, Luke Coss sat at a mezzanine desk in the hotel that night and did what excited rookies usually do at the end of their first day in a big-league camp — he wrote home. One letter went to his

mother and the other went to Johnny Hill. The pen was a new one presented to him by Miss Ellison.

"Keep Johnny informed," she'd said. "He'll pass the news on to me and to all your friends along the route."

Luke had plenty to tell Johnny — the bus ride, the discovery that there was no reservation for him at the hotel, the meetings with Dave Barton, Hec Turner, and Mousey Maynard, Hec lending him his glove, and Mousey hitting him fungos long after all the others had gone in. He said nothing about a redhead who had smacked him down. Johnny had warned him about girls and Johnny would only worry, though there wasn't a thing to be worried about. Not a thing.

"I pulled a bad one, Johnny. Remember you told me the managers like the hustlers who are first on and last off the field? I didn't stop to think that meant after you'd worked into condition. Denny Hays told me to limber up the first day, but Mousey hits fungos in all directions and usually just out of reach and ran me until my tongue was out. I guess it was hanging out pretty far when Denny found me for he was pretty sharp when he ordered me in. But the trainer put me under a hot shower and I'll be all right tomorrow. But will I obey orders strictly from here on! Only the pitchers, catchers, and rookies are here now. Hec's here to take off weight. You eat all you want and what you want, and just sign the check. The club pays the bill. A few of the rookies went to town on that menu. They say they probably won't be here long and will make hay while the sun shines."

Luke, nibbling at the end of the pen, wondered how long he'd be here. All the other rookies had had some



minor-league experience and seemed to know with what club in the Buff organization they'd play next season as they stepped up a league or so in class. It was, Luke thought, a bit like college — freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes before they graduated to the Buffs. Only two or three had a chance to stick with the club this year. The Buffs, he had discovered in this first day, were well stocked with infielders. And that made it particularly bad for a rookie infielder who had not had a single day of minor-league training.

For all his kidding, Old Hec would probably be around for a long time yet and Hank Mooney, the third baseman, who had broken his ankle last July, was reported to be as good as new. Nick Horsaf and Peck Wilson were fixtures at first and second. The two utility infielders, Stan Fox and Hughie Baird, were still young and well experienced in big-league play. Fox had been around for five years now waiting for Hec Turner to give up. On almost any other club in the league he'd have been a regular, but the Buffs wouldn't let him go. He was insurance against the day Hec would play short for the last time.

Luke could see exactly where he figured. They wanted to look him over. The club, in signing him, had taken Dave Barton's word, and Barton, after seeing him in only one game, had taken Johnny Hill's word. If the Buffs took a shine to him — there it was. If! If the Buffs took a shine to him, he wouldn't be sent home but would be sent to a Class D or maybe C club to begin his education. And that would be better than the mines and his mother's worry.

He'd save the best news for the end:

“I've already had one good break. Who do you think I'm rooming with? Old Hec. Mr. Shortstop him-

self. How about that? Here's my chance to really learn something about shortstop play from a master. Of course, when the regulars report, I'll be shifted in with another rookie, but — But I remembered something you told me, Johnny, that a lot of good boys ate their way out of the leagues and I didn't overdo it. Anyway, I'm rooming with Old Hec and that's enough for the present."

Luke had taken a light tropical worsted suit out of his bag and now looked like Florida. Nobody'd look at him now and snicker. The suit was a year old. Mr. Wedge, the club secretary, had handed him an unexpected twenty-five dollars, telling him that rookies and regulars drew that much during the training season for personal expenses. Part of the twenty-five had gone into a quick pressing job that had done wonders for the suit and for him. He no longer felt like an alien. He had been tempted to gloat to Johnny about sitting here in summer duds while the boys back home were mushing through snow, and then had thought better of it. He might be back in the snow with them before long.

He bought stamps at the cigar counter. There was a dance going on in the Palm Room and men and women were passing in through the lobby. He watched the dance for a while and suddenly realized he was searching the Palm Room for a redhead. Abruptly he turned toward the elevators. He might as well get to bed.

Mousey Maynard came toward him, smiling, friendly. Mousey looked sharp, a real big-leaguer, in a brown coat, tan pants, two-toned shoes, yellow shirt, and a brown-and-yellow tie. "How's the shortstop?" he asked.

Luke grinned. "Tired. Too much outfielding."

Little wrinkles broke all around the pitcher's small dark

eyes, and all at once Luke knew where he had gotten his nickname. Those wrinkles around the small dark eyes gave him a certain look.

"I hear you're rooming with Hec."

Luke nodded. "I'll try not to bother him."

Mousey's unexpected laugh had an edge of amusement. "Old Hec's quite a kidder. Best guy in the world, but he likes his little joke. How do you sleep?"

"I've never had any trouble and I'm sure I won't to-night."

Mousey chuckled as though enjoying a secret joke. "How's your nerves?"

"Never had any — except maybe before a football game."

"So you're a football star too?"

"Hardly. I played a little in high school."

Mousey gave broad shoulders a quick, keen appraisal. "Playing modest?" He crinkled his eyes and looked at the shoulders again as though he were turning something in his mind.

"Ever do any wrestling, shortstop?"

Luke frowned. What did all this mean? "I've fooled around with it some," he admitted.

Mousey seemed to make up his mind. "I've told you Hec's quite a kidder," he said confidentially. "Just forget where you heard this, but if you happen to wake up to-night and things get rough, remember your wrestling and the shower bath."

An elevator door slid back and Luke stepped into the car. As nearly as he could figure it, Mousey was trying to tell him, without making it too plain, that Hec, the kidder, would try to rib him during the night. Johnny Hill had warned him that as a rookie he could expect some

good-natured hazing and to take it the right way. Mousey, an old-timer, had tipped him off about another old-timer, but wanted to be protected. Fair enough.

The elevator let him out on the fourth floor. The room was dark; he let himself in quietly, thinking Hec might have gone to bed, but the veteran's bed was empty. He took a shower, put on the fancy pajamas his mother had given him last Christmas, wound his watch — a graduation present from Johnny Hill — knelt by his bed for a few minutes, opened a window wide, and turned out the light. He tried to guess what trick Hec might pull on him and what he could do about it. Anyway, Hec was a nice guy and, whatever the trick was, it wouldn't be too rough.

Music, muted, came up to him from the Palm Room. He stretched in a luxury of rest. This was a wonderful bed, this was surely a wonderful world!

He awoke from a confused dream of baseball men, and a redheaded girl, and a mine — and heat. Heat in a mine always meant trouble. He awoke breathing heavily, wet with sweat. He knew it had been a dream, but the heat was real. The sweat was real. He glanced toward the window he had left open and saw that it was closed.

Why had Hec closed the window? He knew it must have been the shortstop; the veteran's form was a long bulk in the other bed. For a moment he was tempted to shower again, but gave up the idea. He might wake his roommate. He reopened the window and slipped back to bed. He was drifting into sleep when suddenly he was once more awake — awake and alert.

Hec was sitting up on the side of his bed. He reached for his shoes and put them on, and then put on his shirt and his coat. Next he went to the closet for a hat.

Enough light came through the window to reveal the

room dimly and all at once Luke was grinning into the semidarkness. So this was the beginning. Hec had been awake all along waiting for him to stir. The closed window was part of the joke, what part he didn't know.

Hec was now walking toward the window, fully dressed except for his pants. He put one leg out the window.

Luke sat up and swung his feet to the floor. The pattern was becoming plain. He was supposed to go into a panic, yell for help, rush for the window to pull Hec back. Well, this was one time a rookie would play dead and see how far the joke would go.

And then he knew it was going too far. The veteran was actually going out the window.

"Hec!" Luke leaped away from the bed, caught the second foot going out the window, and pulled hard. Hec came back through the window easily enough and Luke, relieved, began to laugh. It had been a rib, a good rib. It had fooled him completely.

"O.K.!" he said. "I'll admit it — you fooled me. But you needn't have run the chance of breaking a leg doing it. Then somebody'd get your job."

Hec spoke, and Luke had a feeling the shortstop's voice had an unnatural quality. "So you figured you'd get my job by breaking my leg, eh?" He kicked his foot loose.

Luke was jarred by this unexpected maneuver. "Take it easy, Hec." He walked toward his own bed, and then a mountain hit him. Somebody was on top of him and an arm was hooked around his neck.

"So you'd break my leg to get my job, would you?" The mountain was Hec Turner.

"Cut it out, Hec," Luke cried sharply.

The arm around his neck began to choke. Fun was fun,



but this was getting to be too much. He dropped his hands to the floor and began to arch his back.

Hec, he discovered, was both heavy and strong. Very strong. The guy didn't know his own strength or he wouldn't be pouring it on like this. Even a rookie didn't have to take a hazing that became pretty rough.

He twisted and rolled, broke free because of his knowledge of wrestling, and was on his feet, panting. Well, this ought to wind it up. This ought to be as far as the joke would go.

Instead, Hec came at him, swinging. A blow caught him on the side of the head and spun him around.

Luke got mad. If this was Hec's idea of humor, the old-timer was nuts or something. He didn't want to bust the veteran, but neither did he want to take another sock.

Hec was coming at him again.

Luke went back to football. He went in with a low, diving tackle and brought Mr. Shortstop down. Hec, hitting the floor, began to punch and to kick. Luke knew he was in a real fight.

He knew something else. There was something wrong with Hec Turner. He thought, with a pang, that he'd have to hit him. He didn't want to do it. Then a thought of Mousey and what Mousey had said leaped to his mind.  
*If it gets too rough —*

Luke got to his feet and a chair fell with a crash. As Hec came at him again, he ducked under outflung arms, picked the veteran up, and staggered under the squirming weight into the bathroom. He dumped his load into the tub and reached quickly for the shower knobs.

Hec began to shout.

Luke reached for the light switch.

Hec let out a yell. "Turn off that hot water; turn it off."

Luke was hotter than the water. "All right," he grunted; "try the cold." He turned the cold water on full.

The yelling stopped and Hec sat in the bathtub looking dazed.

Knuckles were pounding on the bedroom door. A voice said, "If you'll step aside so I can use a passkey—" The next instant the bedroom was full of people. All the Buffs seemed to be in the room.

There was some laughter, uncertain and subdued. As though it had been cut in the middle the laughter stopped. Denny Hays, black-visaged, was in among the players, wrapped in a bathrobe. He came into the bathroom, glared at Luke, and looked at his shortstop.

"Get out of there."

Dripping, Hec Turner stepped from the tub.

"Use those arms."

Hec swung his arms about.

"All right?" Denny demanded.

"Sure; why not?" Hec walked into the bedroom, something of the dazed look still in his eyes.

A man with a key in his hand said, "What's going on here?"

"Nothing," Denny Hays answered. "Nothing at all."

"Nothing? I'm the night manager of this hotel and you tell me nothing's going on when half my guests start calling up in the middle of the night?"

"It's all right," the manager of the Buffs said a little wearily. "I'll explain later. If you'll get some of these people out of here—"

The hotel man shooed out all except the Buff players. The door was closed.

"I want no talking about this," Denny said grimly. "If this gets into the newspapers, the man who tipped it off



will find himself back in the minors. Get to bed."

The players filed out. Mousey Maynard, passing into the hall, caught Luke's eye and put a finger to his lips.

Hays went outside with the hotel man and Luke felt sick. If he was in trouble because of this "joke" he'd take it out of Hec Turner tomorrow if it was the last thing he did. And if anybody else was mixed up in it he'd take it out of him, too. If necessary he'd fight the whole club. He walked to a chair and sat on the arm, and tried to relax and take the knots out of his nerves.

Denny Hays returned almost at once. Hec was in the bathroom peeling off wet clothing. He came out naked and said: "Throw me pajamas, Denny. That's my dresser; third drawer."

The manager threw him dry pajamas. "All right; spit it out. Let's have it."

Hec shrugged.

"O.K.," Hays said sharply, "so you had another nightmare. Just what happened? Or is it a lodge secret?"

"I don't know," said Hec. "I woke up in the shower."

Denny looked at Luke. "All right; you talk."

Luke told what had happened. "I understood Hec was a great kidder."

"Didn't you know he was having a nightmare?"

"No. I didn't know it until just now when you said nightmare. I thought he was kidding, that it was part of a rookie's ribbing —"

"Do you call stepping out of a window kidding?"

"I didn't know what to think. It looked to me to be going pretty far. When I pulled him back by the foot and he came willingly, I thought that the joke had run out, that we'd get a laugh. Then he jumped me. After that I didn't have time to think."

Hec rubbed his fingers across his chin. "You mean I really went for you?"

"Plenty," said Luke.

Denny Hays spoke. "Nobody told you, Coss, about Hec's nightmares?"

"No."

The manager looked as though he would explode. "Why didn't you tell him, Hec?"

"I intended to, but he was asleep when I came in. How did I know this would be a night I'd have one? I put the window down and went to bed."

Now they both looked at Luke.

Luke said: "I woke up sweating. I saw the window had been closed and I wondered who had closed it on a hot night. I thought it was a funny kind of kidding."

Hays's eyes were sharp. "You keep talking about Hec being a kidder. Where did you get that?"

Luke said nothing.

After a moment Denny said: "All right, skip it. How about it, Hec? Think you'll be O.K. the rest of the night?"

The shortstop nodded. "I'll be all right now. I never get two in a night."

"Want to stay in here with him, Coss?"

"Why not?" Luke still couldn't figure it all out. "If he starts throwing his weight around, I'll know what to do."

"How did you happen to think of the shower?"

Again Luke protected Mousey. "It was either that or slug him. I don't want to do that."

"Thanks, kid," Hec said dryly, looking at the boy's arms and shoulders.

"Hec has a nightmare every so often," Denny Hays explained. "Since his first season with the Buffs he's never had a roommate — too many of them took a going over."

We had to put you in here, Coss, because the hotel was crowded, and this was the only place we could stick you. Hec wants closed windows and the boys who roomed with him wanted air. You're the first who's been able to handle him. Change beds. Coss, push your bed against the window and drop the window from the top. If Hec tries to get out the window, he'll have to climb over you. That'll be your signal to give him the shower. I'll sleep better if I know he has a bodyguard. Maybe it's lucky this thing happened."

The manager adjusted his bathrobe and departed. A slow, wry smile went across Hec Turner's face.

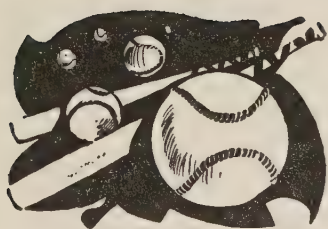
"Sorry, pal; but I'm glad you didn't bang me up."

"So am I," said Luke.

He moved his bed and the light went out. Perhaps Denny Hays was right; tonight might be a lucky break. Johnny had advised him to make himself useful. He knew the Buffs couldn't keep a spare player around for no other reason than to safeguard Old Hec, valuable as the veteran was. But, during the training camp period, this might help him stick around a little longer. The longer he stayed, the more he could learn. The more he learned, the better player he could become. The longer he stuck around with the squad, the longer time Denny Hays would have to look him over.

Out of the darkness came the shortstop's voice. "Good night, pal, and thanks again."

The voice was friendly, warm, companionable. Without knowing why, Luke found himself thinking that perhaps Old Hec had wanted a roommate all along.



## CHAPTER

### 5

Luke had always envied kids who had brothers and sisters.

Other boys he knew had families — a brother to pal with, argue with, fight with, fight for. He'd felt cut off, without ever having realized that he was lonely.

Hec Turner, a canny veteran in big-league experience, was his first roommate. Hec was years older; but Luke had begun to suspect that, though Hec tried to talk like a decrepit ancient, he would never grow old in a lot of his thinking. Looking across the room at the form in the other bed, now peacefully sleeping, the rookie had a comfortable feeling that stayed with him. He awoke in the morning with the same feeling — a feeling of having had a friend with him through the night who was still there with him.

Hec, already awake in the other bed, yawned. "Hi, pal."

Luke sat up. "Hi, Hec."

Hec's lips puckered. "Had a look at yourself?"

"Why?"

"Run into a door or something?"

Luke touched his eyes. One of them felt puffed, tender. "Shiner?"

Hec chuckled. "I wish I knew if I did that with my right or my left. I'd save it for my Sunday punch. Go ahead and take your shower. I had mine at two this morning."

Luke went into the bathroom. Somebody else might boast of giving him a shiner and he'd want to pick it up right there. Somehow, the way Hec said it, there was nothing left over to pick up. He looked at his eye in the mirror and whistled under his breath. It was going to be a beautiful shiner, the first one since his football days. He took his shower and swabbed the eye with cold water. Hec was yawning when he came back to the bedroom.

"Everything's all wrong," the shortstop complained. "You have to get up when you're sleepy and go to bed when you're wide awake. Hays makes midnight the curfew hour for the Buffs." He looked at the open window. "Maybe there's something in that fresh air theory; I had one swell sleep. How do you feel? Any soreness?"

"Plenty."

"Take it easy today. No chasing fungos until tomorrow."

"I guess I overdid it yesterday." Luke hesitated. "Hays thought so."

"Denny's been bringing squads to training camps for a lot of years," Hec said. "Who was hitting them out to you, Mousey?"

Luke nodded.

"A great kiddier. That ground is hard. Too much of it right at the start and you might come up with shin splints or stove up your legs for a week."

Something registered with Luke. Mousey and Hec had each called the other a kiddier.

Hec stopped at the lobby newsstand, bought two pa-

pers, and gave one to him. Other players, in groups, were scattered through the dining room; glance after glance went to the shiner. But Denny Hays had said that there was to be no public talk and there was no comment. Some of the rookies Luke had eaten with the night before were at a big table. He took a step toward them as Hec stopped at a small table.

"This O.K., pal?" the veteran asked.

"Couldn't be better," said Luke. He hadn't expected to eat with Hec. He hadn't thought veterans gave much attention to rookies.

The other rookies at the big table, he saw, were really laying in the groceries as though an immediate food shortage was on the way. He waited for Hec to order and repeated the shortstop's order, including tea. He'd have liked a stack of wheat cakes and a pot of coffee, but the shortstop had been around a long time. What was good for a careful veteran was no doubt food for a youngster called up for a trial.

Hec gave an approving nod. "I've seen more than one player eat himself out of this league."

Strange, Luke thought, that Johnny Hill had said practically the same thing. He opened his paper to the sports page and read the story about the Buffs. Stan Fox had the headline — Stan was a holdout. Stan had returned his contract unsigned and the Buffs had announced that they had made a final offer. There was a cut of Stan Fox in batting stance. There was no mention of the arrival of an untried shortstop named Luke Coss.

A voice asked, "Picture in the paper yet, Shortstop?"

Luke looked up to meet Mousey's smile. Mousey's hand was on his shoulder.

"What happened to the eye, Shortstop?"



“I ran into a door.”

Mousey's laughter held undercurrents of something shared. “See where Stan's still holding out? If you'd only let Hec go through that window last night, Shortstop, to-day you'd have his job.”

“An idea,” Hec said dryly. He was grinning at Mousey and, because he was grinning, Luke also grinned — and didn't quite know why.

A waitress brought their order. Mousey glanced at their table and then at a nearby chair. Luke expected Hec to say, “Sit down, Mousey; join us,” but Hec said nothing.

“Looks as though you shortstops want to be alone,” Mousey commented. He gave Luke a private wink and joined the rookie table. Almost immediately Mousey's robust laugh rang through the dining room; the laughter of the rookies, as they cast glances at Luke and Hec's table, was more restrained.

“Quite a kidder, Mousey,” Hec said. He seemed to be saying something with his eyes that Luke didn't get. The shortstop poured his tea. “Nothing like flavored hot water in the morning.”

Another robust laugh came from the rookies' table.

“Some players eat themselves out of a league and some players kid themselves off a ball club,” Hec said pleasantly.

This time Luke caught what it meant. Mousey called Hec a kidder and Hec called Mousey a kidder, and a kidder could kid himself right out of his job on a big-league ball club. He tried to think of something to say and gave up; it wasn't his play to say anything. It was all right for old-timers to make cracks about each other, but a smart rookie kept his mouth shut.

Last night the bed had been luxury. This morning the

dining room was more luxury. Semitropical sunshine, a spacious room bright and gay with color, tables with spotless linen and gleaming silver. Luke's orange juice was served in a glass that was sunk in a silver bowl of shaved ice. This certainly wasn't coal-mine-town living!

Hec had an after-breakfast errand. Left alone, Luke sat in the lobby apparently absorbed in his newspaper but not reading a line. He was caught in the middle of something and he still couldn't figure out what that something was.

Mousey dropped down in the adjoining chair. "You remembered the shower, didn't you?"

Luke's "Uh-huh," was noncommittal.

Mousey was appraising his eyes. "It must have been something of a rough session."

"Why didn't you tell me about the nightmares?"

"I haven't been with this club any too long, Shortstop. I'd heard stories about Old Hec, but you hear stories about every veteran ballplayer." He gave the eye another survey. "How was I to know if what I'd heard was the McCoy? I've never studied up on sleepwalkers, but their aim doesn't seem to be bad. Did he do any talking?"

"Some."

"What did he say?"

Luke hesitated. "It was only a mumble."

Mousey gave him a sidelong look. "Well, Shortstop, if I roomed with a sleepwalker, I'd study up on what made them walk — and talk — particularly if he had a good right or left hook." The pitcher slapped Luke on the back. "See you out there. You've got a lot of pep; keep shaking it out and making them notice you. Keep letting them know you're around. Anything I can do to help, just call on the Mouse."

Luke, confused, went back to a newspaper he wasn't reading. He was getting two kinds of advice from two old-timers. They'd both been around. Hec had said to take it easy today; Mousey said to shake out the pepper and let Denny Hays know he was around. One of them had to be wrong. Both had warned him that the other was quite a kidder. In one way all this attention from stars could be flattering. But in another way it could be disturbing.

The lobby clock said it was time to start for the ball park. The players were crowding into cabs; he got into a cab with four other rookies and they shared the fare. Shut off from the driver by a glass panel, the others joshed him about the shiner. This was the give-and-take of good-natured banter. Under it all, though, lay a wonder. How come an unknown had been roomed with one of the great stars of the game, and how come that unknown and a star like Hec Turner had had a rumpus? And how come the unknown was sporting a black eye and still rooming with the star?

At the park Willie Herman, the trainer, gave the eye treatment with ice and a sterilized needle.

"If I had a leech," he said, "I could bring it down quickly. You must be quite a boy to handle Hec." Willie seemed to know the real story. "Hec's quite a boy with his fists when he has to be. If it ever happens again, Luke, give him the same treatment — cold water. Never slug him."

"Why should I?" Luke asked. "I like him."

"I know; but sometimes a guy's in a mix-up and forgets. You've got the sloping muscles of a puncher; you hit a man in a state like Hec gets into and you might really hurt him." The needle was put away in a leather case. "The guy who hurts Hec and puts him out of action isn't going

to be popular around the Buffs."

Luke didn't have to be told that. Another question was on his mind. "What causes nightmares, Willie?"

Willie shrugged. "Search me. I'm not supposed to know anything about nightmares. I'm only the trainer."

Was Willie hiding something from him, Luke wondered, or was the trainer giving it to him straight? And if everybody was out to catch a rookie in a razzle-dazzle stream of having some fun with a rookie, why had they picked on a rookie who wasn't important enough to get his name in the paper?

The work that morning was routine conditioning, without pressure. Luke, along with the others, did some jogging around the field and some throwing, and there were pepper games of bunting, and deft, sharp handling of the ball. The pepper games called for speed of movement and his distressed muscles protested. But by noon quite a little of the soreness had worn away.

He had stuck with the rookies. They were more his kind, though he was the rawest rookie there. They had given him a free-and-easy, unquestioning comradeship and, after the soreness had begun to ease, he'd had fun. It was good to be out there in the sunshine, to sweat and to feel his body glow. He was beginning to separate the rookies, to fit them into the picture, to remember their names. In particular he took a liking to Eddie Horne, who looked as though he should be playing a violin in an orchestra instead of playing professional ball. He was thin, good-looking, with a sort of poetic frailness. He was the type, Luke was sure, who would get along with girls. And the next moment, to his surprise, he was thinking that Eddie would have got along with the redhead.

At the end of the morning session he had his choice

about lunch. He could dress and go back to the hotel, or stay in uniform and eat a snack in the clubhouse. Most of the rookies went back for another battle with the menu, but Hec stayed at the park and Luke followed his example. He ate half a dozen oranges from a gunny sack, drank four pints of milk, and mixed the milk with crackers.

Hec, stretching, announced he was picking out a cool spot for a siesta. After a reasonable time, for he didn't want to appear to copy Hec too obviously, Luke found another cool spot in the shade of the outfield fence.

He had something to do, and this seemed to be a good place to do it. He knew he'd been in a daze ever since leaving home; he wondered if every rookie went through this bewilderment on his first trip to a big-league camp. Everything had been new and strange; the situations that had come up had also been strange. The redhead on the bus hadn't meant anything to him; she'd been a symbol. He knew he hadn't handled that any too well. Had he been smooth, he might have made pleasant the tedium of the bus ride. But he'd been a roughie. He had lots to learn, off the field as well as on. The rough edges had to get knocked off before you could be a big-leaguer in any field. This knocking off of edges must hurt sometimes, but that was the price.

For the first time in his life he was in a spot where he had to figure things himself. There was no mother, or Johnny Hill, or Miss Ellison, to straighten him out. Advisers had turned up — too many of them. He liked Hec, but he was fearful, uncertain. He didn't know whom he could trust. He'd have to wait to see what developed.

Eddie Horne came walking along the fence and Luke made a motion. Eddie looked pale and tired as he sat down on the grass.

"I thought you'd be at the free-loading table," Luke said. Eddie seemed to be the thin type who needed plenty of food.

"Stomach," Eddie said. "Nerves. It always hits me that way the first few days in camp. I lay off acids and stick to milk."

"I never know I have a stomach," Luke said, boasting a little. "I came out here to think."

"About last night?"

Luke wondered how much Eddie really knew. "That, and some other things. This is my first time at a training camp. I'm scared. I've played only high school and semi-pro."

Eddie said: "I'm scared too, and I've had three years in college and two in Class A. I'm twenty-three."

"You don't look it."

"That's one of my troubles; I don't look it. How old are you, Luke?"

"Nineteen."

"You look older — that'll help you. There's no reason for you to be scared."

"No? It's either make good in baseball or go back to the coal mines or a steel mill."

"You'll do all right. They wouldn't have brought you here if they hadn't thought you were a good prospect. You sleep well, don't you?"

Luke was on guard. "Usually."

"Nightmares are warnings of severe mental strain." Eddie was silent a moment. "That's why Hec was almost sure to have had one last night."

Luke threw away caution. Eddie knew. "Why?" he asked.

"It's simple enough. Baseball's his major interest; he's



afraid of what his life will be without it. He knows some young fellow will inevitably take his place. So he fears every new young fellow who does come along. It wasn't bright to put you in with him."

"But he's been swell to me."

"Sure; he probably likes you. He knows you're still years away from being an active danger to his security. That's how he feels when he's awake. But at night, after he falls asleep, you become his enemy."

Luke looked skeptical.

"All right; let's examine it. He tried to walk out a window. You pulled him back. You spoke to him — tried to wake him up?"

Luke nodded. "I didn't know he was sleepwalking."

"Your voice registered on his subconscious. What did you say to him?"

"I said if he went out the window he'd break his leg and then I'd have his job."

"Did he say anything?"

"He said, 'So you'd break my leg to get my job?'"

"Then he went for you? It's as plain as daylight. He was still in a nightmare, but he answered you and went for you. He was still asleep, but his fear was riding him."

Eddie had made it seem plausible.

"What did you think when the whole thing started, Luke?"

"I thought it was a gag."

Eddie stared. "Why?"

"I'd been —" Luke checked the sentence before he'd said "told." He had a small doubt of Hec, a big doubt of Mousey. And yet Mousey might have really tried to do him a favor. He said lamely, "Hec's a great kidder and I was a rookie, made to order for kidding." An instant later

he asked: "How come you know so much about nightmares? Study it in college?"

"Some." Eddie pulled a blade of grass. "My father's a doctor and I started out to be a doctor. That's what my father wanted. But — Well, my father and I came to an agreement. I'd give baseball a try; if I didn't make a major-league club within a reasonable time I'd give it up. This is my second time up with the Buffs; this is the year of decision. If I don't make it, I'll quit and go back to college, but I'll probably switch to law."

"Why?" Luke asked.

Eddie pulled another blade of grass. "Too many arguments with my father about medicine. I've had nightmares too, Luke. I wonder if they should keep you rooming with Hec."

All at once Luke grinned. "Once Hec sees me in action, he'll sleep fine."

Cabs had brought the heavy-eating rookies back from the hotel. Players began to drift out on the field for the afternoon practice. Mousey Maynard swaggered past at a distance.

"Now there's a guy," Eddie said, "who also has a problem."

Luke had begun to like this sort of talk, strange as it seemed at a big-league training camp. "What's his problem?"

"He's a good pitcher and the best jockey in the league. He has a value because he can ride opposing teams. He gets away with it because he doesn't mind backing it up with his fists. But he also likes to play jokes on his own teammates. He's out for some fun, but his teammates often don't think it funny. That's why he's drifted around the league and has played on so many clubs."

They got up from the grass. Eddie trotted off, light and easy, stepping high. Watching him, Luke decided that Eddie probably was a speed boy, a ball hawk. He passed the place in the shade of the fence where Hec was still sprawling.

"Time to go to work, Hec."

"It's like I said, pal," Old Hec grinned; "you get up when you're still sleepy and go to bed when you're full of life. Let's make a date for tonight. We'll tear into a steak."

"That's for me," Luke said fervently. A steak sounded good.

Denny Hays appeared, to start the afternoon's work, and thoughts began to race around in the mind of a nineteen-year-old kid from a coal-mine town. Eddie Horne was a shortstop. Eddie was also a candidate for Hec's job and the rival of every other rookie who came to the camp as a shortstop. Was all the stuff that Eddie had been feeding him on the level? If Eddie was on the level, then a doctor's son had come to camp with a problem as big as the problem of a boy named Luke Coss. Bigger, perhaps. Did every rookie here have his own hidden problems, his own secret hopes and fears?

Or was everybody out to kid a rookie from a coal-mine town?



## CHAPTER

### 6

Hec Turner was sprawled on the bed in his shorts watching Luke get dressed for dinner and lamenting that old guys like him had to snatch rest whenever they could get it to keep going.

Part of Luke's twenty-five dollars had gone into clothing. He was wearing the summer suit he had brought with him, but the twenty-five dollars had helped to add black-and-white sport shoes and a blue tie splashed with red.

"You look," Hec said approvingly, "like a Buff." There had been a time, he went on, when ballplayers hadn't been welcomed at the better hotels. But Al Hartford had insisted on the best for his Buffs, and had made his players live up to what was expected of the best. If a rough-house guy hadn't caught on quickly, he'd soon been told.

Luke, looping his tie into a knot, remembered that Al Hartford was the Buff manager who'd been interested years ago in Johnny Hill.

"Al would have loved Eddie Horne," Hec said, getting up from the bed and beginning to dress. "There's a kid who doesn't have to practice being a gentleman."

"How good is he?" Luke asked curiously.

"You've come to the guy who can tell you," Hec said dryly. "Anytime a shortstop blows in here I make it my business to learn everything about him. Eddie's got speed to burn and that helps his hitting; fast guys seldom go into a bad slump because they beat out so many infield hits. Fancy fielder too; hands not too big, but he gets the jump on the ball. Arm just fair."

"Think he's got a chance to stick this year?" Luke, fashioning a knot, watched Hec in the mirror.

"You know how to tie a tie," Hec approved. "Not many guys ever learn the trick, not even the movie stars." He pulled on trousers and answered the question. "What happens to Eddie depends on Hank Mooney's ankle."

"I thought it was all right."

"Nobody'll know until he tries to stretch a hit. If it doesn't hold up, Eddie could stick — unless he's too nice a guy. You've got to be built for baseball. You've got to be a little rough, outside and inside."

"Suppose Stan Fox doesn't sign?"

"He will. What else can he do? When's your trunk coming?"

"I wasn't sure how long I'd be around and —"

"Modest guy, eh? Wait for me downstairs and I'll show you how to tear into a steak."

"Nobody has to show me. I could eat a whole beef to-night."

"You know how to eat sensible too."

"I've been watching you."

Hec grinned. "It didn't escape me. You watch and you learn. You're built for it. Sit down now and send for your trunk."

Luke wrote to his mother and asked her to pack a trunk with his summer stuff and send it on.

"Don't get excited, Mom; it doesn't mean anything. I may be here for a few more weeks and I'll need slacks and a sport coat or two."

He mailed the letter in the lobby. "Modest guy, eh?" Hec had asked. Did Hec mean it or was he being taken? He didn't like this business of becoming suspicious of everybody and everything.

The lobby was crowded with smartly dressed people. Eddie Horne, Luke was quick to notice, looked completely at home — much more of a person in a maroon corduroy jacket than in a baseball uniform.

"How about dinner?" Eddie asked.

"I'm waiting for Hec. He'll be right down."

Hec stepped out of the next elevator and the three of them went to the dining room. Hec seemed to like having Eddie along and Eddie seemed to like being with Hec. They ordered their steaks, talked baseball, and looked at the sports pages of the evening newspapers. Luke was discovering that a training camp lived on baseball talk and baseball news.

"Well, well," boomed a voice: "a shortstop convention." Mousey was there again, with his smile and blinding tie. He sat down and glanced from one to the other.

"Who threw the paint bucket at you?" Hec asked.

Mousey fingered the tie. "Better be nice to me, Hec — you might need me. Looks like these rookies are ganging up on you. Today I saw them plotting out by the fence. They didn't bother to come in for lunch."

"Neither did I," Hec said. "I stayed out to watch them."

"Better sleep with one eye open tonight. And speaking of eyes —" Mousey peered at Luke's reduced shiner.



"You wouldn't think a little thing like that would be worth a newspaper item."

"What paper?" Luke asked sharply. He'd seen nothing in the sports pages.

"You don't know where to look, Shortstop." Mousey took the newspaper from Luke's hands and turned the pages. "Not sports; the society section." He pointed to a few lines of type:

"Sights to see: the gorgeous sunset on a fresh rookie's eye. On the first day in camp too."

All at once a hot flood began to rise in Luke's chest, a hot flood that went right up to his head. He saw Mousey's small eyes watching him, glinting with humor, waiting for his reaction. Slowly he brought the heat out of his head and forced a smile.

"What is it?" Eddie asked.

"Some wise guy," said Luke, and read the sentences aloud.

There was silence around the table, a silence broken by Mousey.

"You're going to be newspaper copy, Shortstop. Any time a ballplayer can make the society section he's really cooking. If it had been Society Eddie here, nobody would be surprised. But a rookie fresh out of — Where are you out of?"

"Out of the paper," Luke said. He hoped he was playing it right. "They didn't mention my name."

"Maybe they'll mention it tomorrow."

"They might," Hec said softly. "He's got a good publicity agent, it seems. Spread it around, Mousey."

"I don't have to — it is around. Well, keep punching." Mousey pushed back his chair and breezed away.

Hec's eyes followed him sleepily. "Mousey's always got to have his little laugh. You did the right thing, pal — laugh with him. But why should I teach two guys who are after my job?"

"Because you know you have nothing to fear from us," said Eddie.

"See what I mean?" Hec said to Luke. "A nice guy. Making the old man feel good. Thanks, Doc. Now I'll show you the proper procedure with a steak."

Luke said, "I'll be eating while you're demonstrating."

Hec talked as he carved. "First you have to be hungry for it. Cut it carefully with the grain, not against the grain. Lift it to your mouth slowly; sort of play around with it. But for proper enjoyment you should have pleasant company and pleasant thoughts. Right, Doc?"

"Right," said Eddie.

"Now take a fellow like Mousey," Hec said. Luke was discovering something else — that Hec had a habit of jumping from one angle of thought to another. "Watch him when he eats. He snaps at it. Eat that salad, pal; it's good for you. And get that crack in the paper off your mind. Like I said, the way to handle the jockeys who try to get your goat is to give it back to them with a smile — then they're stuck with it."

"Right again," said Eddie.

"Suppose," Luke asked, "the jockeys go too far?"

"That depends on what kind of guy you are inside," Hec said seriously. "Some can carry a fire inside and others explode. Yes, it depends on what kind you are."

Eddie leaned forward. "Aren't there times when it would be better to explode, to get rid of the fire inside before it comes out in other ways?"

Hec pondered, staring at his plate. "What ways, Doc?"

Luke waited. Was Eddie going to bring the cause of nightmares out into the open?

"Well —" Eddie was all at once vague. "Oh, a lot of ways."

Hec was right, Luke thought. Eddie was too nice a guy.

That night, as he lay in his bed by the window, listening to the breathing of the man in the other bed, he was a little sorry Eddie hadn't been truthfully tough. It might have been better to tell the veteran bluntly. For Hec might continue to be a friend while awake and an enemy while asleep, his fears stoking up the slow fires that would explode into future nightmare violence.

Luke wished he could go to sleep. He had to be right tomorrow; he had to be right every day. Everything had been simple at home. Here nothing was simple.

He had made a friend of Hec. Tonight he had decided that that much was true. He had unexpectedly found a buddy in Eddie Horne. About Mousey he still couldn't make up his mind. Mousey might be the jockey who jockeyed friend and foe. Now there was another jockey he didn't even know, the newspaper writer who had laughed at him in print.

Luke decided that life probably wasn't simple anywhere, at home or away, once you began to grow up. He listened to the breathing from the other bed, and all at once wished he was back home, a kid again, with no big problems on his mind, nagging him and keeping him awake.

A bell seemed to be ringing, faintly, far away, insistently. The clamor became louder, louder —

Luke awoke and sat up in bed. It was only the room phone, probably the morning call.

But it wasn't the morning call.

Hec had answered. Hec was saying, "Can you give us half an hour?" He hung up and groaned. "Now I'm your social secretary, pal. You're having breakfast with Kenny Smith."

Luke was still a bit sleep-drugged. "Who's he?"

"Don't you read sports pages? The press, pal; the press. Up and under the shower. You don't keep the press waiting if you're smart."

"What could he want with me?"

"Might be your life story."

"Don't kid, Hec."

"No kidding, pal — get moving. I told him you'd be down in half an hour."

Puzzled, Luke took his shower; and while he toweled himself, Hec shaved and gave what he called "a publicity lecture to a one-student class."

"You were just another rookie, pal, until you got a shiner and it got into print. That brought you to the attention of the sports writers, who are often hard up for stories in the early days of camp and on the lookout for rookies who have color. You're about to become a celebrity. Kenny Smith has decided you might have color."

Luke discarded the towel. "How big is he?"

"Tops."

"What'll I tell him?"

"He'll ask — you just answer."

"How about coming with me?"

Hec was headed for the bathroom. "What do you think I'm hustling for? I want to find out some things about you myself, so I'll know how long I'll be with the club."

"There's nothing to find out. What'll I wear?"

"Now I'm a valet. This is no style show we're going to."

“How about calling Eddie?”

“No dice. I hope to muscle into this story myself. Eddie might shut me out.”

As they dressed, the Old Professor, as Hec now was calling himself, continued his lecture. A ballplayer was like an actor; the public paid to see him perform and also liked to read about him. That's where the reporter came in. The more that was written the better, because the ball-club owners were impressed by publicity. It was smart never to get mad at anything the reporters wrote.

“If you get a reputation as a beefer,” Hec said, “they might not write about you at all. If they want to make a character out of you, help them along.”

“I'm no character,” Luke protested.

“Everybody's a character, pal; some of us just happen to be better advertised.” And as they went downstairs, the Old Professor expanded his remarks on what he chose to call charactership.

“Well — how *do* you know if you are one?” Luke asked.

Hec smiled. “Smitty will find out. He's an expert.”

Luke, following Hec off the elevator, stopped short. The redhead of the bus was at the newsstand. She turned, and this time he knew that she was really something. She was coming toward the elevators.

Hec, talking to a man who might be Kenny Smith, called his name.

But Luke was watching the redhead. If she noticed him, she gave no sign. She walked past him as though he were not there and the smile that had started at the corners of his mouth died. Behind him an elevator door closed and she was gone.

“Pal,” said Hec, “this is Kenny Smith.”

The sports writer had an easy smile and a pleasant voice.

But Luke was apprehensive. In the dining room he was quiet and let Hec and Kenny Smith do the talking.

"I had to worm into this," Hec told Smith, "to keep an eye on the guy who's after my job. That's why I room with him. An old codger on his last legs can't be too careful."

Smith laughed as though he understood Hec perfectly. The talk drifted from the Buffs to old-time ballplayers, some of whom Luke remembered.

Kenny Smith was surprised. "You know quite a bit about some of the old-timers, don't you?"

"That's because of Johnny Hill," Luke confessed.

"Was he a ballplayer? I never heard of him."

Luke shook his head. "He could have had a trial with the Buffs. He always liked them." He couldn't tell them that Johnny had passed it up because of a fear. "He took me to see the Buffs when I was only a kid in grammar school. He told me to watch Hec."

Hec Turner yelped. "You see, Smitty, what I'm up against? This boy's been plotting against me all his life."

"Tell me more about Johnny Hill," the sports writer urged. He added, "I pity you, Hec."

Luke felt he could talk freely about Johnny, and let his tongue go. After all, the more he talked about Johnny, the less stuff he'd feed Mr. Smith about himself — stuff that might make him a character. He told how Johnny had brought baseball back to the high school, how he had helped with the Mine Workers' League, and finally how he had induced Dave Barton to come to the championship game.

The newspaperman took paper from his pocket and a pencil.

Luke thought: *Here come the questions. Here's where I have to be careful of what I say.*



But all Smith wanted was names — Johnny's, Miss Ellison's, the name of Jimmy Duncan, the union district vice-president, the name of the town.

"How about a picture of you and Hec out at this park this morning?" Kenny asked. "I'll see that you get a few prints to send home to Johnny, your mother, and Miss Ellison."

"Why should I do anything for some buzzard who's been plotting all these years against me?" Hec demanded indignantly. But there was no rancor in his eyes.

Luke was sure now that he was beginning to understand Hec Turner.

Smith put his pencil and paper away. "About eleven, boys? Don't pay any attention to this old groaner, Luke; he'll still be playing baseball a hundred years from now. If you write to Johnny, tell him I might drop out that way someday and talk to him."

Luke, relaxed, thought he had been clever in keeping the talk about Johnny. And he did want the prints. No matter what happened, here would be the proof that he'd once been up with the Buffs and had been photographed with Hec Turner.

The talk turned to Hank Mooney's ankle. Manager Hays, Smith said, had received some new X-ray pictures and the club physician was dubious. Hays wouldn't know anything until Mooney came to camp and they saw how the ankle stood up.

"Printing it?" Hec asked.

"What the club physician thinks? No. Too much chance of throwing Mooney into a skid. Hays let us in on the story; we'll hold it until he tells us to let it go."

Luke listened breathlessly. This was baseball from the inside, knowledge that the fans might not have for weeks.

"I think Hays is wrong about Stan Fox," Smith went on. "The boy means it. This is a real holdout. This could be Eddie Horne's year to stick if he cared more about the game. He has plenty of natural ability."

Luke suspected it wouldn't do Eddie any good to have the sports writers suspecting he wasn't serious about the game, but he didn't contradict Smith. A bright rookie didn't do too much talking.

In a dining room gradually filling, he knew that his table was attracting attention. It was something to be interviewed by Kenny Smith in a profession where publicity meant so much. He tried to look as though he weren't conscious of the envious glances of the other rookies. He'd have to keep his fingers crossed until he saw what sort of character Smith made him out to be.

Mousey breezed in as they were leaving. "Looks like the old Mouse is a pretty good publicity maker at that, eh, Shortstop?" He patted Luke's shoulder. "Got everything you wanted, Smitty?"

"O.K., Mouse." Smith's smile made Luke wonder whether Mousey had really arranged this interview or was trying to muscle in on it.

"Don't forget to tell them he's my boy," the pitcher called after them.

So Mousey was trying to muscle in! And then Luke forgot Mousey, for he saw the redhead sitting in the lobby with two older women. Luke was sure, this time, that she had seen him.

Smitty and Hec stopped to speak to the older women.

Hec said, "Mrs. Barton, you're looking wonderful."

"Did you get in last night, Mrs. Hays?" Kenny Smith asked.

The questions identified the women as the wife of the

scout and the wife of the manager. Luke wanted to walk over to the group, but the redhead was acting as though he were the invisible man. He smiled at Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Hays and kept on walking. A thought prodded him. How close was this redhead to the club? Was her name Barton or Hays? This might complicate things. She might think he had passed up a chance to meet her, but how did he know she wouldn't bat him down again? This time she'd be batting him down before people who knew him. He wasn't having any of that.

Let her go on being mad! This town was full of nice girls, but with two practice sessions a day he had no time for them. And he certainly didn't have any time for a snippy redhead who might be related to a Buff scout or the Buff manager.

Climbing into a cab with some of the other rookies to go out to the field, he had to admit to himself that he'd be interested in knowing who she was. Perhaps, in a round-about way, so as not to reveal he was interested, he'd ask Hec tonight.



## CHAPTER

### 7

After dinner Luke wandered off alone to see a movie. The feature picture left him cold, and he came out in the middle of it. The lobby had quieted down when he returned to the hotel, and he went up to his room. Hec, Mousey, Dave Barton, and another man were playing hearts. The other man turned out to be Bill Jenkins, an old Buff catcher now umpiring in the International League. Jenkins had come south to get into physical condition and would umpire the Buff's practice and exhibition games.

Luke hadn't realized that umpires also had to go through spring training. Another one of the many things he didn't know about baseball!

This was no time, he also realized, to ask Hec about a girl. Mousey would go to town on that one. What Mousey didn't know wouldn't hurt him. Mousey was too hungry for laughs.

There was plenty of laughter in the hearts game. Luke had watched Johnny Hill and the coal miners play it at home, and now he watched how these men played. Here, he quickly decided, was more science. Every now and then the umpire would wink at him, and that usually meant trouble for Mousey.

After a while Luke noticed something else. When those around the table slipped trouble to the umpire, it was all in fun, but when they gave the bad news to Mousey, there was barb behind it. And Mousey would laugh long and loud and then he would say something that had an edge to it.

That was the main trouble with Mousey, Luke decided — there was always an edge to his laughter and he always seemed to want the edge. He seemed to think he was entitled to it. He had even tried to edge into the picture at eleven o'clock that morning. But Mr. Smith had been there with the photographer, and Mr. Smith had taken care of that very smoothly.

The game was still on when Luke went to bed. He hadn't asked Hec about the redhead.

Two mornings later Luke found a note in his mailbox at the desk and a sports page torn from a metropolitan newspaper, a big-league newspaper. The note said:

“Luke: Hope you like it. Smitty.”

Luke spread out the page. There was the cut of him and of Hec, with a caption. The story head read “They Love the Buffs,” but, instead of being about Hec and a rookie, it was about Johnny Hill's devotion to a coal-mine-town kid, and the Buffs, and the kid who was now rooming with Hec Turner, the greatest shortstop of them all.

It didn't seem much of a story to Luke, but Kenny Smith had written that it was rich with human interest. Luke didn't quite know what human interest meant. He'd seen plenty of stories about himself in the home-town paper while playing for his high school and in the mine league. What set this story apart was that it had appeared in a big-time daily with a large circulation. It would be

something for Johnny Hill to pin up on the wall beside his bed and to take with him on the mail route. And it didn't make Luke out to be a character.

He had left Hec sleeping and had come to the dining room for an early breakfast. And all at once it hit him. This story might be picked up and go all over the country. He'd no longer be a rookie from whom nothing was expected, but a rookie, known to a lot of people, from whom much might be expected. He was proud and scared — really scared. It was as though he'd sneaked out on a big stage where he didn't belong. The spotlight had hit him. He was in the spot and on the spot. Now he'd have to make good. Nobody would expect him to stick with the Buffs this year, but he'd have to show some class. Something like that had happened to Mel Ott when he'd joined the Giants, but it seldom happened to any raw young rookie. He'd be expected to make one of the Buffs' farm clubs and not be sent home to the mines. All over the country they'd know about the mines. Mr. Smith had called him "The Coal Mine Kid." But still that didn't make him a character.

The dining room, at this early hour, was almost empty. The other players would pick up Mr. Smith's paper at breakfast. He didn't want to face the players, at least not in the hotel. He wasn't sure how he'd react. He didn't want to seem cocky. He'd probably get some kidding and he wanted to be able to take it.

He stepped into a cab outside the hotel and rode to the ball park solo. Paying a one-rider fare came high, but he still didn't want to seem cocky. This seemed to be the best way.

He dressed and went out on the field. He had been a solo rider; now he was alone on the field. Nerves began to



strum; he tried to keep his mind from working too fast by running, jogging, fielding a ball he threw against the stands.

A long time later the players started to come out. Nobody gave him the eye; nobody kidded. The morning session went on in its usual pattern. They hadn't seen the story or had paid no attention to it.

After all, why had he feared attention? There were stories in the newspaper every day, different stories every day. The reporters had a tough time digging up stories while only the rookies were in camp; a smart writer had filled up space with a rookie, Johnny, and Hec, and had dressed up a sports page salad. It would be big stuff back home in a coal-mine town. But to the rest of the country it would be another spring training camp story about another rookie, perhaps another morning-glory.

He was glad he had come out early. Had he stayed at the hotel, he'd have been self-conscious. They might have thought he was strutting and saying, "Look at me; my picture's in the paper."

Denny Hays had come out on the field with Dave Barton, and a grounds crew was wheeling out the batting net. This morning would see the first batting practice.

Luke began to shake. This would be the first test. Up to this point he'd had wonderful breaks. This morning he'd be on his own. He'd be in there against big-league pitching, the thing that Johnny Hill had feared.

The players formed in line at one side of the net. He took his place near the end, where he knew he belonged.

Mousey was pitching to the batters, lobbing them up because at this point no player had sharpened his batting eye. Mousey, getting his arm in shape, wasn't throwing too hard.

The batters were all meeting the ball. That was what was expected against easy pitching. Bang, bang!

Eddie Horne looked graceful up there — Bang, bang! Eddie was a line-drive hitter.

Luke's turn came and he stepped into the cage.

Mousey grinned. "Well, well, here's the CMK in person."

Laughter wove a thread around the cage.

They *had* read the piece!

The blood sounded in Luke's head. *O.K. Laugh, you guys; I'll show you.* He was tight with anger.

The ball came up, looking as big as a pumpkin.

Luke missed it. The force of his swing almost threw him off his feet.

Mousey roared, and he tried to drive the next one down Mousey's big mouth.

He missed again, this time on a low one. Mousey was almost doubled over. Luke felt like throwing the bat at him.

"Easy does it, pal." It was Old Hec's voice, very quiet, the voice of a friend. "Wait for it."

The next one came up, a floater. Luke waited as long as he could, let go, and missed again.

The laughter around the cage was softer now. They might be sorry for him.

Mousey started to throw with an exaggerated girlish motion, and suddenly let go. The pitch came in fast, but high — too high, much too high.

Luke swung and the ball sailed to the deep outfield.

Now Hec was in the cage, talking softly. "O.K., pal; always bow out when you look good."

Luke moved back to the end of the line. Eddie smiled encouragement. The other faces seemed blank.

There was a sharp crack. Hec had driven a ball back through the box so fast that Mousey had to jump to get out of the way.

Mousey grinned. "Hey, what's the idea, Hec? Trying to kill me?"

Old Hec was waiting. This time Mousey took a windup. The ball whistled in, and whistled back past Mousey's head.

Denny Hays called sharply, "Get out of there, Mouse!"

Even Luke, rookie though he was, knew that the idea of batting practice was to give the hitters something to hit and not to fool them. Mousey had broken all the rules and might have been hurt by one of the line drives Hec had shot back at him.

But the Mouse had to have his laugh!

That night, as though nothing had happened on the field, the pitcher slapped Luke on the back. "Shortstop, you had a big day."

Luke was cold. "Did I?"

"Strike-outs? Shucks! Liable to happen to anybody. First time up you were nervous." He unfolded a paper under his arm. "You've made society again. Keep this up and your pal Eddie is going to be jealous."

Luke read:

"The Coal Mine Kid made his debut at the plate today. Very hilarious. Whiffed three times. Probably hasn't adjusted his eyes to the daylight yet."

"Very funny," Luke said, forcing the words out.

"All free too, Shortstop." Mousey was jovial.

"Who writes this stuff?"

"Jackie."

"Jackie who?"

"Just plain Jackie. Nobody knows who."

"I'd like to meet him."

Mousey seemed to think this over. "Why, Shortstop?"

"Oh, just to thank him."

"Not a bad idea, Shortstop."

Luke was getting another idea, an unexpected idea. He was thinking how good it would feel to bust Mousey on the nose and see if he thought that was funny.

But Luke knew that he was learning, though the learning didn't seem to be doing him any good. He'd learned a little about the fine points yesterday; he'd learned a little more today; probably he would learn a little more tomorrow. It would be impossible, he thought, for any rookie rooming with Hec Turner not to learn. And still it wasn't doing him any good. Today he'd bobbled two ground-hit balls and had had another sorry time at the batting cage.

His trunk had come to the hotel that day and was waiting for him. Low in spirit, he felt now that sending for it had been a mistake. He had a mind to leave it in the hotel storeroom unpacked, so that it could be sent back at a moment's notice.

But Hec brushed that aside. "Send it up," he told the porter's desk, and stretched out on the bed while Luke put underwear, shirts, and socks in dresser drawers and called the valet to have wrinkled slacks and sport coats pressed.

"What I need," Hec sighed, "is a wheel chair so I won't have to walk back and forth through the lobby. When you're an old gaffer, you've got to take care of your legs. When I was a young squirt with lots of zing-and-zang, a bad day with the pitchers or a bad day in the field never worried me."

"Who's worrying?" Luke demanded, nettled.

"You are," Hec said mildly. "Of course, every rookie does some worrying —"

"I thought you said you didn't."

Hec rolled with the punch. "Never expect an old man to have too good a memory. Anyway, we're speaking about you. You're too anxious, pal; you're pressing. You're fast, and you've got a good pair of hands, and —"

"Wonderful hands," Luke said in sarcasm. "Today I bobbled two grounders."

"You fought the ball instead of playing it."

"I suppose I was fighting the pitchers?"

"No; you were fighting yourself. Too anxious. You didn't wait for the good ones. You've got to let yourself go loose — loose and easy and smooth."

"Denny Hays hasn't spoken to me in two days."

"Pal, Denny has plenty on his mind with Mooney's ankle, Stan Fox's holdout, and me likely to fall apart by July 4 and be carted off to the old people's home. Denny's trying to see the team he'll put on the field this season. He can't afford to let the right men go and he can't afford to hold the wrong men."

"He's certainly not trying to see me."

"Pal," Hec said quietly, "you'd better snap out of it. Dave Barton saw you play and signed you; Dave knows his business. They wouldn't have brought you here unless they thought you had something."

"You mean that, Hec, don't you?"

"I don't butter rookies, pal."

Luke put away the last piece of underwear. The greatest shortstop in baseball was trying to build him up and he was acting like a spoiled brat.

"Why don't you throw something at me, Hec?" he asked miserably.

"And have Denny Hays on my neck for knocking out the boy who'll someday take my job? Remember what I told you, Denny can't afford to let the right boy go."

Luke was warmed through, and the warmth stayed with him all during dinner. Then, with Hec over at the newsstand talking to the girl behind the counter, the memory of misplays in the field and poor hitting again settled upon him blackly and the warmth was gone. He went up to the room and was there only a few minutes when Bill Jenkins walked in for the nightly game of hearts.

"Hec's down at the newsstand," Luke told the umpire.

"I saw him," Jenkins said dryly. "For an old, moaning, crawling wreck Hec wasn't doing bad." He kicked off his shoes, picked a chair, put his feet on the window sill, and settled low on his spine. "I like these training camp sessions. I can be a human being. No living in different hotels from the players and traveling on different trains. But though I'm in the same hotel with the Buffs, its still smart to hobnob with old pals like Hec, Dave Barton, and William Herman and stay away from ballplayers."

A shadow crossed Luke's face.

Jenkins grinned. "That doesn't mean I don't consider you a ballplayer. What I mean is, you don't figure to be in my league this year."

"I don't figure to be in any league," Luke said glumly.

"Kid," said the umpire, "don't sell yourself short. You're over your head down here — everybody knows that — but you're doing all right. I've been looking at them for a long time and I'm telling you. You've got an arm, and for a big fellow you've got speed, and though you haven't showed it to me yet, Dave Barton says you hit a long ball. Any guy who hits a long ball, they take a good look at. I've been watching you. You're too anxious; you swing



at anything. That makes you duck soup for the pitchers."

Here, thought Luke, was the same criticism Hec had made. "What do I do about it?"

"You stop being the guy hitting at almost every ball. I've been watching that ball come in there for a lot of years, kid, and I'll tell you this — the difference between the big leagues and the minor leagues is just a matter of a few inches up around the plate. The major-league pitcher gets those couple of inches with better control and the major-league batter gets them with a sharper eye, better judgment, and more patience. Just a matter of a few inches, kid."

Tonight Luke was learning something about umpires. They had always seemed to him to be stony arbiters who defied storming players and the boos of the stands. He was discovering that umpire Bill Jenkins was a bit of a humorist and a friendly philosopher.

"I'll watch those inches tomorrow," he said doubtfully, "and the pitchers'll throw them past me."

"Sure," Jenkins agreed; "you'll get too cautious. Then you'll go back the other way again, but little by little you'll be settling into your groove. Work out your stance so that you'll feel good up there. Have the proper balance. Then watch the ball from the time it leaves the pitcher's hand until you decide to swing or let it go by."

Luke sat in thought. How uncomplicated and natural baseball had seemed when he'd played with the high-school and mine teams, and what a specialized art it had become now that he was in a big-league camp! But certain things must be basic truth, for Johnny Hill, Hec, and Bill Jenkins had all told them to him.

Jenkins was speaking again, slowly, mellowly. "Those things don't come easy. Hornsby was a .200 hitter until he

worked out his stance and had enough experience. You got things to learn, kid, sure; but you'll learn because you want to learn. Right now you're fighting them too much — but the big thing is you *are* fighting. You stick when they're breaking rough — just like you waited up there until you hit Mousey the first day. And you did something else that was smart — you stepped out after you'd hit, when you looked good."

Now Luke smiled. "Hec told me to do that."

"You listen to guys like Hec. And don't let Mousey get your goat. Mousey should be a good experience. You'll run into a lot of Mouseys in baseball, but many of them will be worse. Mousey's just trying to have fun, though his ideas are a little peculiar at times. Some guys get cruel at it — and I mean cruel."

Once Luke had asked Hec what he should do about kidding, and Hec had told him to take it and not to blow his top. That had had to do with Mousey's type of kidding. What about the cruel kind?

Luke asked, "Suppose I run into it?"

"Let's put it this way: If a guy gets his needle into your hide and won't take it out, there's nothing left but the old-fashioned persuader. Invite him under the stands. Most of the needlers don't like that. But as a general rule it's bad for a rookie to get a reputation as a fighter."

This was, Luke remembered, something else that Hec had told him.

The umpire took his feet off the window sill. "The boys ought to be coming along." He turned in the chair and gave Luke a long look. "The big-leaguer is the guy who comes through when the chips are down. Never forget that, kid. Guts! Guts and experience! The more he's been through, the more stuff he's got to go through with the

next time he's the clutch man. Experience! See what I mean, kid? But you always have to get it the hard way."

Luke said, "Thanks, Mr. Jenkins," and decided to switch to a different tie. The umpire had given him a thought that had taken a toe hold. What might look like bad luck might turn out to be all right — if you stuck. He had thought the world against him when he had missed out on the football scholarship and had told himself that the world loved only a winner. Bleak disappointment had forced him into the coal mines — but the coal mines had led him back to baseball. Baseball had taken him out of the dark, dank mines and given him his chance. But his own thinking had brought him nothing. He had simply done what he had to do at the time when things were roughest — and out of that had come the break.

In the mines he had known, without knowing why, that it wasn't right for him. This pressing wasn't right for him, either. He was trying to be a big-leaguer before he was ready. But he knew he was built that way. He had to try hard — Bill Jenkins had practically said it was better to try too hard than not to try hard enough. That was what they seemed to think was wrong with Eddie Horne. Eddie, for all his education, was as mixed up as a coal-mine kid had been.

Dave Barton and Hec came in, and Luke moved to the window and looked out into the night. It was a little odd the way Eddie had opened up to him, the rawest rookie in the camp. Two people mixed up in their thinking!

Willie Herman banged on the door and pushed it open. "How's it going, Luke?"

"Swell," said Luke. That wasn't true. He was getting himself into some deep thinking and he wasn't a deep thinker. He kept thinking of Eddie and, when the hearts

game started without Mousey, he called Eddie's room.

"We're getting up a movie party," said Eddie.

The idea hit Luke on the button. "Count me in."

Eddie and four other rookies were waiting in the lobby. Luke didn't know them well; he'd been thrown in, pretty much, with Hec and older players. They walked to the movie house, climbed to the top balcony to get seats, spread around in singles for a while, and finally, as the crowd thinned out, got together in the same row.

The feature movie was good and the comedy was funny. But it wasn't as funny, Luke thought, as Big Jack Silkowski, one of the group. Big Jack was the sort of guy who made remarks in an undertone. He made for a lot of extra laughs.

They window-shopped on the way home. They were all young, and there was something electric in the night that made life good, high-spirited. They gave the girls the once-over. But there was no whistling, no remarks. Luke had always thought that stuff cheap. Back at the hotel they had malts and Cokes at the drugstore counter and then sat in the lobby and watched the dance set pass in and out of the Palm Room.

"This is no place," Big Jack said, "for rookies. We don't have enough money to date a girl and do the date proud. Let's get upstairs."

Luke thought it a good idea.

But before the group could leave their chairs, Mousey came in with two blondes. Another group came in from a different entrance and moved toward the music. The redhead was with this second group; she wore a yellow dress that, Luke thought, made her look like all the money in the world.

The two groups met, stopped, chatted, and together

turned into the Palm Room. Mousey gave the rookies a wink. Luke thought the redhead had seen him, but she kept her eyes turned away. He was glad she ignored him. She apparently knew Mousey, and if Mousey got hold of this — the thought stopped. Got hold of what? There was nothing to get hold of. He'd never spoken to this girl who might be related to the manager or the scout. And yet, if Mousey started kidding about the redhead — Luke knew that this was something he wouldn't take.

They went upstairs to the row of rooms the rookies occupied. Big Jack roomed with Buck Shawl, a pint-size pitcher. Buck owned a radio record player and had a lot of the latest records. At half past eleven Willie Herman put his head in the room and suggested that they shut up shop.

"You boys are going to need your sleep. First practice game tomorrow."

Luke took the elevator down to his own floor and went whistling softly through the hall. The magic of this night that had turned out so well was still on him. The light was out in the room; he stepped in quietly and closed the door carefully. Hec had had no more nightmares, but there was no sense in disturbing him. He started for the bathroom, intending to undress there.

A voice demanded, "What's the idea of waking me in the middle of the night?"

Hec sounded truculent. Luke, uneasy, switched on the light. The magic of the night was gone.

But Hec was grinning. "I wondered how long you were going to keep old folks' hours. Where you been?"

"To a movie with some of the boys." As he undressed Luke told about the movie, the things the group had done.

"Whistle at any girls?" Hec asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

Luke tried to laugh off the question. "I didn't know an old guy like you was interested in girls."

"Why not?" Hec persisted.

Luke was silent a moment. "If I had a sister, I wouldn't want boys whistling after her in the streets."

This time it was Hec who was silent. Then, "Stay with it, pal," he said.

Luke turned out the lights, and the tune he'd been whistling in the hall went round and round in his head. He'd had fun tonight, real, carefree fun. It had been like being with his old gang at home. No problems, no pressure.

And tomorrow the first practice game! He began suddenly to tighten. This was what both Hec and Bill Jenkins had warned him against. He was already pressing in anticipation. He had to relax and to play tomorrow's practice game tomorrow, not tonight.

The tension began to lessen. He thought Hec had dropped off to sleep until Hec's voice came from the other bed across the room.

"I still look at them, pal, and I keep thinking the same thing."

"What?" Luke asked.

"I keep thinking they couldn't have looked so good when I was young. Especially the redheads."

Luke was startled.

"Like redheads, pal?"

Footsteps went along the hall and a door closed.

"I don't do much good with them," Luke said. "They



don't like me." Just what did Hec's question mean?

The shortstop laughed softly. "Good night, pal."

Luke drifted off to sleep, still wondering what Hec meant, his head full of a tune and a redhead. But at least while thinking of the redhead he wasn't stewing about tomorrow's practice.



## CHAPTER

### 8

The early training sessions had been designed as a hardening process for general conditioning. Now Manager Denny Hays had decided it was time to start exercising the particular muscles each man would use in playing the game. He wanted the pitchers to start throwing, the hitters to sharpen their eyes and get their swings in the groove, the fielders to start fielding — all under game conditions.

But the practice games would be easy at first, without too much effort.

Within the past day or two a few more regulars had arrived in camp, and these men played their accustomed positions, but the other infield and outfield spots were filled by pitchers and catchers. The shortstop jobs were taken by Hec and Eddie Horne, and Hughie Baird and Luke played third base. Hec was captain of Luke's team and Mousey ran the other team. Denny Hays sat in the stands with the reporters. A few spectators had been attracted by the first real promise of baseball action.

It was all about as informal as a picnic game and just about as much fun. There was a lot of kidding, particularly between Hec and Mousey, who urged on their

teams as though this was a game in a world series. Mousey was yelling at everybody; and since he was coaching at third base and as Luke was playing third for Hec's team, the boy from the coal mines knew he would probably have a time. But Jenkins had cautioned him that he'd meet lots of other Mouseys in baseball. He'd make this another part of his training and not let anything that Mousey said get under his skin.

Luke was right — he did have a time. Every ball that was hit to him brought a crack from Mousey. If he went in to play the hit, Mousey yelled that he should have gone back; and if he went back, he should have gone in. He didn't get his throws away fast enough.

"Why don't you carry the ball over to first base?" Mousey shouted. "It would get there just as fast."

Luke gave the pitcher an easy smile — at least it looked unforced.

A liner left the bat of the player at the plate and streaked toward him. He made a backhanded stab, found the ball in his glove, and made a lightning throw across the diamond to get Eddie Horne, who had left first with the crack of the hit and was trying to get back. It was, Luke thought in a glow, quite a play.

Mousey was bellowing from his coaching box. "Even a blind pig gets an acorn once in a while. Come on, Jack; hit one down here and show up this third baseman."

Big Jack Silkowski hit a bounder five feet inside the third-base line. It was a routine bounder, an easy play, but as Luke stooped the ball took a bad hop, hit him on the chest, and bounded into left for a double. He waited for Mousey's caustic comment.

Mousey stared and shook his head sadly. Calling to Bill Jenkins for time, he walked slowly toward the bench.

When he came out of the dugout, he carried a chest protector. He walked with it toward third. The spectators, catching the idea, broke into laughter.

Luke said to himself, "Don't let this throw you." Perhaps here was something else that would creep into the unknown Jackie's column. Another chuckle at the expense of a fresh rookie! He couldn't stand there looking ridiculous, waiting to take it. As slowly as Mousey was coming toward him, he went toward Mousey.

The laughter in the stands stopped. They thought he was going to throw a punch.

Evidently Mousey thought so too, for there was a watchfulness about him, a sort of glee as though this was something he would welcome. Hadn't somebody said he was handy with his fists? Luke was aware that Denny Hays had left the reporters in the stand and was walking toward an aisle.

Luke came close to Mousey and suddenly put out his left hand, so suddenly that Mousey reared back in an instinctive defensive pose. Luke gravely put his left arm through the straps of the protector.

All at once the stand was laughing at Mousey.

Old Hec, his eyes bubbling, came over and solicitously began to help. Hec motioned for Mousey to adjust the protector, but Mousey turned and walked toward the plate.

Luke went back to his position wearing the protector and a photographer ran out to get his picture. He posed obligingly. He wasn't so sure about this now. Finished with the posing, he was back at his position. He wondered what Manager Hays thought about it all.

He also wondered what would happen if the next batter should hit one to him.

The next batter was Mousey, which explained why he had walked toward the plate.

Mousey was going to try to hit to him — Luke knew that. The pitcher was deliberately facing third, pointing his bat the way Johnny Hill had said Heine Groh, the old Giant third baseman, had aimed and placed his hits.

Mousey, swinging at a pitch, did hit toward third.

It was a sharply hit bouncer, the kind that might handcuff a good third sacker. Luke wasn't a good third baseman — the position was new to him. He knew the awful thing that was going to happen a split second before it did happen. He was in front of the ball when, repeating what had happened to Big Jack's smash, it hit a pebble, took a quick, unexpected hop, and smashed against his protector.

The ball rolled toward the base path. Luke pounced on it and let fly with a bullet throw toward first. It was in time, but it was high; it pulled Jake Torpit off the bag and Mousey was safe.

Luke tried not to show how sick he felt. His gag had backfired. What now? He hoped that Denny Hays would yell at him to take the protector off. That would give him an out. But Denny had returned to his seat with the reporters.

Luke walked back toward third. The next man would surely shoot at him.

But the next man hit the first ball pitched on a line to right center for what looked like a sure two-base hit. Buck Shawl, the little pitcher, playing right field, did a remarkable piece of ground covering and got in front of the ball. He had a good arm and now he used that strength to speed a long throw toward third in the hope of cutting Mousey down.

A glance told Luke that Mousey was running hard. Then he gave his attention to the ball. The throw would beat the runner, but it was coming in at a tricky angle.

Luke had to think fast. If he backed up for the bounce of the ball, the way it was coming, he would be drawn away from the bag. If he moved forward for the first bounce, he would be on the base line. The runner had the right to that line, the right to knock him off the line.

He knew what Mousey would do if he were on the line.

He was suddenly cool — coldly cool. First he must make sure to get the ball, to hold it —

The ball was in his glove; he had taken it on the second bounce. He threw himself toward the base line, directly toward the runner. This was almost football and football tackling, but he was tackling Mousey with a chest protector.

Mousey had spikes.

It felt like football when they hit. Luke's spine was jarred, but a football tackle had often jarred him worse. He clung to the ball, rolled over, got to his feet.

Mousey, blocked off, was lying on the ground three or four feet from the bag. Luke knew that the kidding play was now his. He took his time and made quite a show of it. Very gently, holding the ball in his bare hand, he tagged Mousey Maynard on the head.

Bill Jenkins, on top of the play, jerked his arm. "You're out!" It was the third out and Hec's team ran toward the bench.

Luke got out of the chest protector. Mousey stood up.

"Thanks, Mousey," Luke said, and handed over the protector.

Mousey said without a smile, "O.K., rookie, so you want to play rough." He went out to the mound.



Luke went into a bench that bubbled with approval. Buck Shawl patted him on the back.

"I guess us rookies can take care of what comes along," he gloated.

Luke was feeling good. "Swell throw, Buck."

Hec was watching Mousey on the mound. "Nice going, pal; but don't forget, Mousey's pitching. Keep your eyes open when you go up there." He selected a bat, ambled to the plate, and drew a base on balls. A disgruntled Mousey had been wild.

One of the jockeys, Luke thought with insight, who could dish it out but couldn't take it.

He followed Hec to the plate. He had kidded the kidder, and the kidder was now pitching to him.

The first ball was a fast outside strike.

Luke shook his head. This wasn't the stuff on which batters sharpened their eyes — this was midseason speed. He had expected that Mousey might try to knock him down with a duster and the strike had slipped past him.

Luke knew that Mousey would try to make him look bad. The kidder was no longer kidding for a laugh. The temptation was to guess that Mousey would now throw an inside hard one and to get set for it.

But Johnny Hill had warned him more than once that guessing was dangerous — that this was the way many batters got hurt. Bill Jenkins had said it another way. "Never guess, kid; wait till it comes up. Watch it from the time it leaves his hand. Decide whether you're going to swing. Then try to read the stitches, study the label —"

The pitch was coming, inside, waist-high. It was a curve that would break over the plate.

Luke made his decision. Following the ball, he "studied the stitches," swung with wrist action toward the finish,

and met the ball solidly.

As he took off for first, he saw the left fielder running to the side, but the ball was curving away from him. He might get a hand on it, Luke thought, but would not be apt to hold it. As he rounded first, the outfield play was in front of him. The fielder touched the ball, dropped it, and bent to pick it up.

Luke put down his head and burned up the path between first and second. A thin stream of sound was coming out of the stand and he went in for second in a head-long slide. He knew he had beaten the throw, that he hadn't been tagged at all. He had faced a determined Mousey who was really pitching and had hit him. He'd hit big-league pitching!

And then he heard a familiar voice. "A great slide, pal, but somebody in our room is out."

Hec was on the bag. Too late Luke realized what had happened. Hec had held up, fearing to be doubled if the ball was caught. But an excited rookie had gone right on running.

Luke tried to get back to first.

Mousey was standing on the base path with the ball. He was entitled to that path. Luke didn't like the look on Mousey's face.

He went in with a football block aimed at Mousey's legs, hoping to upset him and make him drop the ball. After the ball was dropped he could scramble back to first and to safety.

But Mousey was another old-timer who knew all the tricks, including the cute ones. He side-stepped the block and, as Luke went down, got him with an overhand tag that hit like a punch.

Luke saw it coming. Rolling, he got his head out of the

way and took it on his shoulder. Nevertheless, it hurt. It had been intended to hurt.

"You're out," Jenkins ruled.

Luke, on his feet, started for Mousey.

"No, no!" Hec called from second base.

Again Mousey was ready for trouble, waiting for it.

The umpire got between Luke and the pitcher. He pushed Luke away and said softly: "No dice, kid. Beat it and smile."

It took Luke a moment to put himself on ice. That moment over, he patted Mousey on the shoulder and, a frozen smile on his face, ran toward the bench.

Denny Hays, he noticed, had again left the reporters and was standing in the aisle of the stand.

Out on the field that afternoon Mousey had said, "O.K., rookie, so you want to play rough." Not Shortstop, but rookie. But in the dining room that night he was the old Mouse, with his big smile, friendly hand on the shoulder, hearty voice.

"Shortstop," he said, "that ball you hit was my best pitch. Old Hec had better keep an eye on you."

"Two eyes," Hec drawled. After the pitcher had walked away, he said: "Our friend the Mouse is chewing some bitter thoughts. He doesn't like to see a rookie hit a long ball off his best pitch."

"I may never hit him again," Luke said. Praise from the best shortstop in the league was good, but the hit could have been an accident.

Hec Turner said a flat, "You'll hit them all."

Next day one of the morning newspapers carried a picture of Luke playing third and wearing a chest protector. A local reporter named Buzz Whitney had come to the

dressings room for a story and had asked Luke where he had learned to block and tackle. Whitney had turned the yarn into something humorous. Luke discovered that he had all the better of the story. Whitney had made him into a quick thinker with a sense of humor sharp enough to turn the tables on a jockey as experienced as Mousey Maynard.

"Mousey won't like that," Hec said dryly.

That afternoon Luke woke up to something — the reporters were watching him. He had a good day at third, handling seven chances without an error and getting two hits.

"Pal," said Hec, as they stepped out of a cab at the hotel, "pick up a paper and see if Jackie got hold of it."

Luke didn't turn to the society page until he and Hec were up in their room. There it was:

"Suggestion to Manager Denny Hays: Why not traffic lights for the Coal Mine Kid? He needs them when he gets on base — that is, when he does. As a major-leaguer he looks like an excellent bet for the Notre Dame football squad."

"When am I going to get this Jackie off my neck?" Luke demanded. "I'm sick of reading this stuff."

"I think you'll hear more of it at dinner," Hec said mildly.

They were at dinner when Mousey came to their table with the newspaper. His good humor, if anything, was more expansive, as though everything that had happened on the field yesterday had been good, clean fun. But Luke had a black-and-blue mark on his shoulder from the blow that Mousey had aimed at his skull.

As though he had not already read Jackie's column,

Luke read it through slowly when Mousey handed the paper to him.

"You know, Mousey, I'm beginning to think this Jackie person doesn't like me."

"Getting sore?" Mousey asked as though surprised.

"N-no. But it just comes to me that I don't like Jackie."

"Shortstop, don't be foolish. Jackie's making you out to be a character — with my help, of course."

Luke nodded. "Of course. With your help." It seemed to him that for a moment Mousey's eyes were veiled.

And then Mousey's laugh was echoing through the dining room. "If Jackie gets too rough, you can always go in and give him a poke."

Hec, who had listened to the dialogue in silence, now spoke. "Better not give a rookie ideas about smacking people, Mouse."

Again Mousey's eyes became veiled, but this time he seemed to be studying Hec.

"You're right, Hec," he said. "This Jackie might have shoulders and a wallop. It might not be so good for a rookie to start throwing his fists."

He gave Luke the pat on the shoulder that seemed to have become a Mousey Maynard procedure. He was chuckling as he moved off to another table.

It came upon Luke that the chuckle had in it a strange quality of secret amusement.



## CHAPTER

### 9

There was a saying among the Buffs, which Luke had heard, that in Dave Barton the club had two scouts, Dave and Mrs. Dave, and that Mrs. Dave was just about as good as her husband.

Around the Buffs, Bertha Barton had become an institution. That word "institution" usually refers to something venerable and aged, but applied to Mrs. Barton it meant that she had gifts of perception and a baseball wisdom that had to be respected. Like so many of those whose lives are baseball lives, she was superstitious. One year the Buffs hit a winning streak while she was wearing a certain dress, and she wore that dress all through the season. That was the year the Buffs won a pennant.

"How could they have missed?" Bertha had said complacently, giving full credit to the dress. Stout, sympathetic, motherly, she loved the Buffs, and the Buffs in return loved her. If the club could have been said to have a mother, that mother was Bertha Barton. She knew the record of every player who had ever worn a Buff uniform. Her mind was a retentive storehouse of baseball information. Calm and maternal, she uttered her judgments, and from these judgments there was no appeal. At least there



was no appeal for Dave Barton, who often accepted her opinions with a kind of awe.

"She claims," Dave told the hearts game with an understanding grin, "that she hasn't been wrong since before Bill Klem was wrong — and I understand Bill claims he hasn't been wrong for forty years."

Bill Klem, Luke knew, was chief of the National League umpires, one of the really big men of organized baseball.

One of the things Mrs. Barton claimed never to be wrong about was new ballplayers. Dave believed this so firmly that whenever possible he took her on his scouting trips. Club rumor said he was a little afraid to sign a boy without getting her approval. When he did sign a prospect without her O.K., he was always apprehensively nervous until she had looked the boy over and rendered her verdict.

"You're one boy I signed," Dave grinned at Luke during the same hearts game, "without getting Bertha's nod. She's looking you over."

"Was it wise to tell him that?" Bill Jenkins asked after Luke had departed to keep another movie date with Ed-die Horne, Big Jack, and Buck Shawl.

"You mean I might put a whammy on him?" the scout asked. "Listen! I signed that boy; I want to see him make it. He's heard club gossip. He'd be dumb if he didn't know why Bertha was in the stands, and I don't sign dumb boys."

Hec Turner gave a slow, unreadable smile.

Tonight Luke found the movies dull. "Let's get out of here," Big Jack said in the middle of the feature and he followed the others out. There had been a three-minute short of the Buffs in early training, but he had not ap-

peared in any of the shots. However, the pictures had brought him a sharp reminder. Day after tomorrow the regulars would descend upon the camp and the day of the rookies would be over. A week from now some of the group of which he was a part tonight might be gone, shipped to minor-league teams on option. Perhaps all four of them would be gone.

Dave Barton stepped from an elevator as Luke crossed the lobby. "Good movie?" the scout asked.

Luke shook his head. "The last one was."

"The movies and baseball," Barton said wryly. "Good today, bad tomorrow. Going up? That elevator's ready to move."

Luke stepped into the cage as the door began to close.

Hec Turner sat in a bedroom chair, one leg thrown over the arm, lost in thought. "Pal," he said, rousing himself, "do you know you're already better known than any rookie in camp, even those who have been in baseball for years? There isn't a big-time baseball reporter with the club who doesn't know you. That chest protector story has been picked up by sports editors all through the big-league circuit as a good joke on the Mouse. He'll hear plenty about it from rival dugouts during the summer. They'll be interested in seeing you too."

"Where did you get this?" Luke asked.

"From Kenny Smith. He told me just how that chest protector became a good story. Mousey's worked at being a clown; he has a practical sense of publicity. Smith thinks he had that protector planted in advance, intending to use it after an error had been made. It would have been worth only a paragraph or two, but the Mouse lives on paragraphs. When you topped his gag, that turned it from a paragraph into a story. Kenny wondered if you'd

learned about the protector and had also planned your move in advance. I told him you probably thought of it on the spur of the moment."

Luke said, "I knew I had to do something."

"That's what made the story, pal. You clicked in the pinch. You came through."

Came through with what? Luke wondered. A better gag than Mousey's? Resentment chafed him.

"I want to be a ballplayer," he said, "not a clown. I want to click on the ball field."

"Pal," Hec said after a moment, "don't go getting yourself too many high-hat ideas. Take what helps you and be thankful. They're beginning to know you're around. For a rookie, that's the foot in the door."

It came to Luke again, this thing of how valuable publicity could be. Mousey'd been bounced around from club to club, often traded because his reckless joking made him a troublemaker, and yet there was always a club ready to risk dissension among its own players and make a place for him. For he was good publicity, and also a good pitcher. The fans paid their money at the gate and flocked in to see him.

Yes, Luke reflected, publicity could be a foot in the door. But he still wanted to win recognition as a ballplayer and not as a mountebank.

Next morning Bertha Barton was in the stand, sitting with a woman he had never seen her with before. He got two hard-hit grounders for which he had to go deep to his left. He hit one drive between left and center for extra bases and hit another ball that sent the left fielder clear back to the fence. He knew that this had been his best practice session, his best showing.

And tomorrow the regulars would be around!

He ate his usual lunch of milk, oranges, and crackers, and walked out to the shade of the fence and tried to quiet the sudden twanging of his nerves. Tomorrow the regulars! So what? He'd known all along the day would come for them to move in, hadn't he?

The afternoon game started. A ball was hit to him, and he played it cleanly and made his throw across the diamond. He glanced toward the stands. Mrs. Barton had moved down to the rail in back of third base. Another ball was hit to him and went through him. Fast fielding by the left fielder kept the runner on first.

Hec came over from short. "Pal," he asked, "what difference does it make whether she sits back in the stand or at the rail?"

The next pitch was hit to him and he turned it into a double play.

There were no more errors, but he did not get a hit. Denny Hays had coached at third for both teams, and today there had been no Mousey to give him the spurs.

Riding back in a cab, Hec said dreamily, "Pal, give me the guy who can knock down his nerves and play ball."

Reporters in the dining room smiled, nodded, raised a hand of greeting. "Hello, Hec; hello, Luke." Hec was right; the newsmen did know him. Hec was right about something else — there was no sense in quarreling about your luck.

Hec appeared to give the menu a close study. "Pal, maybe this is the night for a steak."

All at once Luke was laughing. "What night, in your book, isn't a steak night?"

Bertha Barton and her companion of the stands came in and took a table near the door.

By and by the waiter was clearing away steak platters

and plates and bringing on the dessert. And a short time later Luke was following Hec toward the lobby.

They had to pass the table near the door. Mrs. Barton was smiling and Luke felt his face, for no reason that he could understand, growing red. Hec had him by the arm.

"Mrs. Brannigan, you look younger every year. I've said that so often to Mrs. Barton there's no use in saying it again. May I present Luke Coss?"

Mrs. Barton put out her hand and patted Luke's hand as though he were a small boy.

"Bless you, honey," she said, "Al would have loved you. Wouldn't he, Mary?"

"That he would," said Mary Brannigan.

Al, Luke knew, was Al Hartford, the old Buff manager, a man who'd never been forgotten. The boy stood beside the table embarrassed, for Mrs. Barton continued to hold his hand in both of hers.

"You're an old Buff, honey, and if I were young I'd kiss you." She laughed at the other woman and released him. "Take good care of him, Hector."

Hec pursed his lips. "Why should I? He's after my job."

Bertha Barton's eyes crinkled. "You go with the franchise and you know it."

Again, as they walked away, Hec took Luke's arm. "Well, didn't I tell you to send for your trunk? When Bertha called you an old Buff, she was paying you the supreme compliment from an old-timer around the club."

Luke said a dry: "Wait until the regulars get in. Who's the other woman?"

"Didn't you get the name?"

"Brannigan?"

"Doesn't that mean anything to you?"



Luke thought for a moment. "You don't mean an old-timer Buff third baseman?"

"I mean *the* third baseman. They never came any better than Mike Brannigan. And as for Bertha, pal, you're missing something. She gave you her O.K. — publicly. That means you're about in."

Pins and needles ran up and down Luke's spine. This was the first time anybody had even suggested he might stick and be sent to a farm club for seasoning. If Mrs. Barton was approving him publicly, she was approving him as a ballplayer and not as the character Mousey had started to make him. He thought he understood the reason for Mousey's attention — understood at last. Of all the rookies in camp, Mousey had picked him as the best butt of the jokes that would get Mousey's name in the newspapers.

His knuckles began to itch and he knew that for a long time he'd wanted to smack Mousey. But what good would it do him? He was a rookie and Mousey was a regular. Bad feeling wasn't good on a club. If there was a fight and anybody had to go, it would be the rookie. On the other hand, Mousey was said to be good with his fists, and if Mousey gave him a licking life on the club for him would thereafter be unbearable. But it was good, thrillingly good, to know that Dave Barton's wife had given him her approval.

There was no hearts game that night and Luke and Hec got to bed early. And at once the morrow began to run around in Luke's head — the arrival of the regulars, the end of the rookie picnic. He knew he was back in an old groove of doing too much thinking, of building up tomorrow before he got there. A thought that bothered him was that Denny Hays had not once tried him out at short,



his natural position. Restless, he punched his pillow into a new shape.

Hec came across the room. "Pal, snap out of it. Wake up."

"I'm not asleep."

"Who were you fighting?"

"Well —"

"Tomorrow? You'll play ball tomorrow just as you played ball today. Cut it out. I'm the one who's supposed to have the nightmares around here."

"You won't have any more nightmares," Luke said.

"Why not?"

"You've seen me play."

"What's that got to do with my nightmares?" Hec asked curiously.

"Nothing," Luke told him. "Go to sleep."

But Hec continued to stand beside the bed. "Pal," he said, "I want to know why you said that. You weren't just making small talk."

Luke berated himself for having let his tongue wag. He'd said the same words before — that Hec would have no worries after seeing him play — but this time he must have put something into his voice unconsciously.

"Give," said Hec.

Luke hesitated.

"Start talking."

"If — if you'll promise not to get mad, Hec —"

"Let me have it," said Hec.

Slowly Luke told the shortstop of Eddie's theory. Once he got started, it was easy to talk in the dark. He finished his story and the veteran was silent for a while.

"How did you figure all this out, pal?"

"I didn't. I told you it's Eddie's dope."

"H'm!" Hec thought it over, then said, "Now the Old Professor will tell one."

"What?"

"I know what was causing all your squirming around."

"What?" Luke asked for the second time.

"You're worried about the regulars coming in tomorrow and you going out."

"Shouldn't I be worried?"

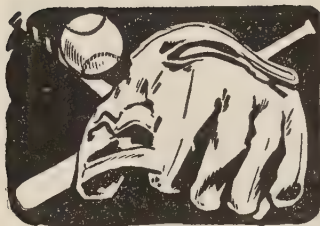
"You kids!" Hec snorted and went back to his bed. "Go to sleep. You've got nothing to worry about. The Old Professor's working things out for the best interests of all concerned — including, of course, the Old Professor."

Luke settled himself for sleep. And then Hec's voice drawled from the other bed. "Mike Brannigan had red hair, pal."

It hit Luke all at once. So her name was Brannigan, and she was the daughter of a famous star of yesterday and of Mary Brannigan. Well, he now knew that much, anyway.

The next moment he remembered something else. Mousey knew Mrs. Brannigan; Mousey knew the redhead. Mousey, who seemed able to pick up so many scraps of information, might know about the trip down on the bus. An old thought came back to him. If Mousey ever brought the redhead into his kidding —

His knuckles had a fresh attack of itch.



## CHAPTER

### 10

The regulars moved in, some arriving in their own cars and some by train, and the lobby rang with the hearty reunion of men who had not seen each other since last October. As though by magic, the hotel took on bustle and color, and the ball park, which had seemed too vast for the rookies and the few regulars who had worked out there, became the gusty, magical, lively place Luke had always thought a training camp would be.

As the morning wore on, taxis kept bringing more veterans out from the hotel.

"Which one is Stan Fox?" Luke asked Hec. His blood ran warm. The regulars had brought a new, quickened life to the training.

"No Stan," said Hec. "I guess Kenny Smith had it right; the boy means it. There's a rumor that the club's set a date and that if he doesn't sign by that date he'll be traded. Personally, I like him, but he's always been a moody, hard-to-handle guy. Maybe he's tired warming the bench and wants to be traded to a club that will play him regularly."

"Which one is Mooney?" Luke asked.

Hec pointed him out. Mooney, in uniform, was putter-

ing around, doing very little of anything.

"He isn't limping, Hec?"

"You know the answer, pal. Wait until he has to run."

Luke was becoming baseball wise, and baseball wisdom was painting pictures. If Stan Fox were traded or sold, Eddie Horne might stick with the club and become first utility man unless — there always seemed to be an unless — the Buffs got a good man in return for Fox in a trade.

The case of Hank Mooney was different. An ankle was a fragile, uncertain thing. It might take most of the season to come around; it might never come around. His substitute, Hughie Baird, was just that — a substitute. Luke had heard the talk about Hughie. A handy boy to have around for emergencies, a good pinch runner and a clever fielder, but too weak with the stick to be in there every day on a big-league club.

Mousey Maynard was all over the field whooping, hallooing, and glad-handing as players arrived.

"Mousey," said Hank Mooney, "I hear there's a rookie here who's been handing it back to you."

"Nobody hands it back to the Mouse," the pitcher said loftily. "The Coal Mine Kid and I have been having fun."

"I can imagine," Mooney murmured.

Luke moved out of earshot.

The noontime halt came and he ate in the dressing room — oranges, milk, crackers. It had become, at this period, a standard lunch. He knew that he was being looked over. His publicity had gone far and wide — farther than he had thought — and the veterans were anxious to appraise him. He was careful to attract no attention to himself. He did not want to be written down as a big head. He went out to his shady spot inside the fence

and took himself out of the way. Hec had made no attempt to introduce him around. Acceptance by the regulars was something he had to win for himself.

Denny Hays called the afternoon game. Not until the line-ups were announced did Luke realize that today the same makeshift teams would be playing before the newly arrived regulars, who had still to go through the hardening, conditioning process. He walked out toward third conscious of another abrupt tightening of nerves. Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Brannigan were in the stands and the redhead was with them. This was the first time he had seen her at the park.

Then he saw Mousey in the third-base coaching box, full of his familiar yackety-yak. Luke's palms began to sweat. The first pitch was hit to him. He charged the ball too fast, fumbled it, and threw it away.

Mousey yelled, "If I couldn't do better than that, I'd turn in my glove!"

Luke found it hard to swallow. It was all right to talk about keeping your head and taking the kidding, but there was a limit. Mousey had no right to stand there and torment him and make him a victim before the watchful regulars on their first day in camp. Nobody had any right to make any other person a target.

"Want to try it?" he asked, offering the glove.

Mousey started forward with his hand out, hesitated a moment as he studied the rookie third baseman, and returned to the coaching box.

The next ball was also hit to third, an easy hopper. Luke gathered it in and pulled Jake Torpit off the bag with his throw.

The lump was bigger in his throat. If Mousey made another crack —

Mousey, bending over to toss a pebble out of the coach's box, said nothing.

The inning ended without Luke's getting another chance. With two out and two on, he came to bat in the last half of that first inning and began to press. He knew he was pressing and couldn't stop it. The memory of two fielding errors handcuffed him at the plate. He swung at two bad pitches and ended by popping an easy one. He trotted back toward his position; his morale had never been lower. He didn't look at Mousey. He didn't look toward the stands.

Back at third again he prayed, as each new batter came up, that the ball wouldn't be hit at him. He knew what was the matter with him. This was a broad daylight nightmare.

He felt his left hand shaking inside his glove. He punched the right hand against it, held his hands together for a few seconds to steady them.

Did his quivering stomach mean no guts? That's what they thought about Eddie Horne.

What was the matter with him, couldn't he take it? He'd taken some tough handling in football.

But in football you didn't have to stand there and wait. You didn't have a guy yelling in your ear, hoping you'd make a fool of yourself, trying to *make* you make a fool of yourself before critical regulars. One of your own teammates, at that.

He had the horrible fear that if an easy bouncer came to him he'd stand there frozen, afraid to touch it. He felt as if he were in some strange place he had never been in before.

But he had been here before. All his life he had played ball. All his life he had built up to this chance.



He could take no more of it. O.K. — *hit it at me and get it over with. Send me back where I belong — to the coal mines. If I can't handle ground balls, I don't belong in baseball anywhere. Why didn't Johnny mind his own business? He didn't have guts enough to try the big leagues himself — why did he send me up here to be made a fool of —*

There it came — an easy hopper to his left. He felt like a stick of wood going after it. He knew his hands would be stiff —

The ball hit a stone, caromed sharply into his glove, stuck there. *Lucky.* Now he had to throw it. He took so much time, threw it so carefully, he almost missed the out. If it had been any runner but Big Jack Silkowski, the ball would have been late.

“Attaboy!” Hec was trying to make it out a fine play. But it hadn't been. He'd almost frozen on the throw.

What did Bertha think of her “old Buff” by now? And Mrs. Brannigan, the wife of a real third baseman, and the redhead? And Jackie, if the “Round Town” writer was in the stand? Well, this would end it. This would be the last day. Two errors and a frozen throw. The regulars were around and the Coal Mine Kid would be going home after this performance — back to the mines. He would never even want to look at a ball game again.

*Crack!*

Luke dove toward shortstop, rolled over, and came up with *the ball in his glove.*

“Fast —” Hec was shouting.

He let go with his rifle shot at where he thought first base must be, fell again as he threw, and had the horrible fear that the ball must have gone on to the stands. But the ball hit Torpit's glove as Eddie Horne's flying feet

were still in the air over the bag. There was an outbreak of applause.

Hec lifted him to his feet. "Another Pie Traynor!"

It was the third out and there was more applause as Luke and Hec came in off the field together. Mousey doffed his cap in an elaborate gesture as they passed. His face was lighted up with a smile — the same face Luke had felt like punching just a little while before.

They said some encouraging words on the bench. Hank Mooney added, "You got it, boy." Luke felt he was the luckiest guy in the world. He had been ready to curl up and quit — then, before he'd had time to think, he'd stuck out his hand, Hec had yelled, and he was a ballplayer again.

Before he'd had time to think!

That was it. He'd been back with an old habit, thinking too much. He'd been defeating himself by thinking of all the horrible things that were going to happen. He'd stop it. He'd tell himself he was another Pie Traynor. He'd pray that every ball would come to him so that he could gobble it and rifle it. He made a swell fielding play, but he hadn't really done it himself. Now he would do it himself. He'd go out there to third base and pay attention only to playing the position. He wouldn't charge blindly and he wouldn't freeze up.

There was one unknown weakness to his plan. He wasn't going back to third base that day.

Denny Hays was on the field with his players. From this point on that's where he'd be every day. He'd said nothing to Luke about his good plays, nothing about his bad and stupid ones. Now he appeared in front of the bench and looked at Hec Turner. The shortstop was fanning himself.

"Take it easy today," Hays said. "Luke, go out to short."

"Here it comes," Hec lamented. "And I've got twenty-two relatives depending on me."

Mousey came in from the mound, wiping the sweat from his face. The manager met him near the plate.

"You're still carrying too much lard. Take over third on Hec's team."

Mousey gave a startled grin as though this was an unexpected gag.

"Go on," Hays ordered. "It looks as though we're going to need all the infield talent we can find on this club."

Nobody clowning around with Denny Hays. The pitcher went out to third. "Now just watch how the old Mouse plays the bag," he called to Luke.

A buzz of laughter came from the watching regulars.

At shortstop Luke tried to figure it out. There was a certain amount of truth in what the manager had said. With Stan Fox unsigned and Mooney's ankle uncertain, the club might need all the infield talent it could get. The boy thought of Hughie Baird — a good pinch runner, a clever fielder, but too weak with the stick to be in there every day. Had they been looking for a baseball miracle, an untried kid who would be better than Baird? Was that why he had been at third base?

But they'd taken him off third.

The answer seemed to be plain. He'd had a golden opportunity, the opportunity of a lifetime, and he'd blown it. He was off third where he might have had a chance to stick and at short where he didn't have a chance in the world. As Mrs. Barton had said, Old Hec did go with the franchise. Hec still looked good for many years.

A ball came into his territory, skimming toward the second base bag. He was ahead of it, scooped it up, threw it with the same motion. The throw was hard and a little high; the first baseman speared it. There was no encouraging chatter from the infield. After all, it had been a routine play.

For a while nothing came Luke's way. He was content because this gave him time to get his bearings, lob around the practice balls, get the throwing range from short again. It was a satisfactory feeling to be in territory that was familiar, like coming back home.

The next play was tougher, to the right. He made a quick grab and a sharp throw. There was an encouraging yelp from the second baseman and a general peppering up in the infield. Luke took part in it, but was careful not to be too brash. He didn't want the regulars to think him too cocky. Things were going along too well, even if he had been moved to short. He didn't want something to come up and spoil it.

There he was again, thinking of the bad things that might happen.

"I've got to stop it," he told himself in a grim undertone. "I've got to keep thinking that everything will go right."

Things did go right. Luke snared a ball that caromed off Mousey's glove, threw the runner out, laughed with the others as Mousey yelled: "*We* looked good on that one, Shortstop. *We'll* take care of this infield."

He took his first throw from the catcher at second base and got his man. He went back into short left for a pop fly, a play at which he had always been good — and had the horrible thought for a moment that it was going to be too easy, that he would clumsily drop it. But he gathered

the ball into his glove.

And in the eighth inning he reached for a high one and drove it on a line to the deep left corner. It was caught — but it had been a long ball. In the clubhouse after the practice Willie Herman pointed out that it would have been a home run at five of the National League parks.

Hec said, “Don’t encourage him too much.”

Willie grinned and gave Hec a resounding slap on the bare back.

“Hey — you tryin’ to ruin me too?” Hec cried.

“No — just trying to get you in shape. I hear one of the AA teams may be looking for a shortstop.”

Willie glanced at Luke as if he had really intended to say that the AA club might be interested in a Coal Mine Kid.

Luke knew, by the attitude of the regulars, that he had moved up a few notches in their opinion. But he wasn’t going to build false hopes. The one ball he had hit had been a bad ball; most of the plays he had made were only what a capable shortstop had to make every day. He’d been playing over his head. There was really nothing to let himself get cocky about — not yet.

Coming back to the hotel, he found a letter from Johnny Hill. Oddly enough, it said the same thing he had been thinking:

“A lot of us are getting Kenny Smith’s paper every day. He’s friendly to you and keeps us up to date on what you’re doing. Along the route they’re asking me when I’m going to get my picture in a big-town paper. They don’t mean it, of course, but it gets a laugh. It looks to me as though you’ve caught on well and have made yourself some good friends, partic-



ularly Hec Turner and Eddie Horne. But, careful, son; don't get cocky. That can hurt."

There was a postscript:

"I'll see you at Buff Field on Opening Day. I guess the whole town will be there."

Luke had a moment of fright. Was the home town really expecting him to stay right up there with the Buffs? No; it was a joke, like people on the route asking Johnny when he was going to get his picture in a big-town paper. Even though Hec had hinted he might stay with the club, he'd settle for a berth on a minor-league team where the Buffs could keep a string on him and watch him.

He stopped at the newsstand and bought Jackie's paper. He had formed the habit of buying it every night. If there were any cracks at him, he'd like to know about them before Mousey came around with the news. More and more he wondered why this Jackie was picking on him. By this time he knew all the newspapermen, both big league and local, and listened whenever a new name came up. Jackie had never been mentioned. He had not asked about him because he did not want anybody to think he was taking the riding seriously.

He opened the paper at the sports page. He was always careful to do that. Then he'd go through the paper, page by page, coming on "Round Town" casually.

A headline reached out of the sports page and kicked him in the stomach:

### FIRST BUFF CUTS IN SPRING ROSTER

He felt weak. His name shouldn't be there. If he was sent to a farm team or sent home, he wouldn't read it in a



newspaper; he'd have been told by the club. They'd come to him with the news and his transportation. But perhaps they'd gone up to his room and he hadn't been there.

His eyes raced through the story. Five names. None was his.

He went to a lobby chair and sat down. He was breathing more heavily than he had at any time that day on the field.

All along, he realized now, he'd been fearing he'd be on the first-cut list. The five men who were being shipped out were all experienced players, much better than he, he thought, and they'd all been moved up a class. His momentary elation left him. These five men had places to go. They'd be playing on a Buff team. As yet, he had no place to go.

And Johnny Hill wrote of Opening Day at Buff Field.

He kept turning pages and came to "Round Town." He caught his name and his pulse quickened, but before he could read the paragraph Eddie Horne came across the lobby. He folded the paper and laid it in his lap.

"Congratulations, Luke."

"On what?"

"Missing the first cut."

"I guess I just wasn't good enough to send any place."

"After some of the fielding you pulled today?"

"Luck," said Luke. He added a quick, "Oh-oh; here comes the National Broadcasting Company."

Mousey was coming across the lobby, a newspaper in his hand.

Luke decided to use the needle first. "O.K., Mouse; you didn't look so good at third yourself."

"I'm just the best infielder on this club," Mousey guffawed. "Who's been getting you all your publicity?"

"Who has?" Eddie asked.

"The old Mouse." The pitcher's face grew serious. "What I came over to say was this — kidding's kidding, but this Jackie guy is going too far. If he picked on me, Shortstop, the way he does on you —" Mousey left the answer in the air.

Eddie laughed.

"What's so funny, Doc?"

"Nothing, Mousey; nothing."

"If you're thinking the way I kid around with Shortstop here, that's different. That's within the lodge. But this Jackie plasters it all over a newspaper. Where do you suppose he gets his dope? He must be out there every day."

"I haven't seen him," Luke said.

"Been looking for him, Shortstop?"

"I thought I'd ask him to always spell the name right."

Mousey's eyes grew small. "I'd like to be there when you meet up with him."

"You probably will be," Eddie said, with something in his voice.

"Meaning what, Doc?" The Mouse wasn't smiling.

"Meaning I'm inclined to agree with you. It might be a good idea if Luke did ferret out Jackie and give him a public smacking."

Luke was startled. This was strange talk from Eddie Horne — easygoing Eddie. "Let's see what Jackie wrote tonight." He started to open his paper.

"I have it here," said Mousey. He read:

"The coal mine will seem like a safe place to the Coal Mine Kid after third base."

"That's rough," Eddie exploded.

"That's what I mean," Mousey agreed. "That's getting

pretty personal." He looked at Luke. "One more crack and I'd let him have it."

The Mouse strode off, his paper under his arm. Eddie looked after him.

"Now he's on his way," Eddie said, "to make sure Jackie writes that one more crack."

Luke looked at Eddie steadily. "You think it's Mousey who's been feeding this stuff to Jackie?"

"Is there much question about it?"

Somehow, Luke wasn't astonished.

"Suppose you could handle Mousey and Jackie at the same time?" Eddie asked.

Luke frowned. "The advice I get is to laugh it off."

"That's what I mean. Make it a laugh."

"How?"

"I'm not sure yet," Eddie said. "Let me do some checking."

They ate at a rookie table where the big news was the departure of the first five. The five, who were to leave that night, shook hands all around. After all, they were moving up in class -- higher ranking league, bigger salary check. They had something to feel good about.

Luke wasn't sure yet that he was going any place. It didn't help him any to have the writer of a column constantly reminding the club that he was a kid who was going to go back to the mines. The competition was tough enough without having somebody he didn't know go out of his way to make it tougher.

A little bell inside warned him to be careful. Eddie had a brain and Eddie might have thought up a good gag, but gags often backfired and led to other things. Now that the cuts had started he couldn't afford to make a false step. Hec had warned him that smacking a newspaper writer

could be the worst mistake of all.

He was still pondering the problem that night in bed. Hec, who had long been quiet, spoke out in the peculiar fashion he had of bringing in a new subject from nowhere.

"Read much Shakespeare, pal?"

"Had some in school. Why?"

"Remember a guy named Cassius?"

"Wasn't he the guy with a lean and hungry look?"

"That's the guy — the one who thought too much. He'd never have made a ballplayer."

"Why, Hec?"

"Because there's only one thing a player should think about out there on the field — the next play. You look over the situation, you figure what you'll do if the ball is hit to you, what base you'll cover if it's hit to somebody else. You close your mind to everything else."

Luke said: "Thanks for the lesson, Hec, but I found that out today. I didn't know you were a student of Shakespeare."

"You find a lot of time to read when you have no wife. And, speaking of wives, I read something else too, but I don't know where."

"What?"

"I don't remember exactly. It's about something or other having no fury like a woman scorned."

Luke thought it out. "Is that another lesson, Hec? I've never scorned any girl."

Hec laughed softly. "O.K., pal. Pleasant dreams."

Luke said good night. More complications, more problems. Hec hadn't fooled him. One of the problems was the redheaded Brannigan girl. She did think he had highbatted her.



## CHAPTER

## 11

Despite Bertha Barton's approval and even though he wore the uniform and worked out with them every day, Luke did not consider himself a real Buff. He gawked at the regulars, particularly his personal heroes, the boys with the big bats — Nick Horsaf, the first baseman, and Terry Bolden, the catcher.

He felt even less a Buff as he read the story in a local morning paper by Buzz Whitney. It was a recap of the training situation to date and a preview of the season ahead. Buzz wrote that the outfield was set; that the catching staff was first-class and the mound corps strengthened by the acquisition of Mousey Maynard, a potential fifteen-game winner. The club was a definite first-division outfit which might even become a pennant contender — if Manager Denny Hays could fill in two important gaps.

The Buffs still definitely needed what they had lacked for several years — a spark plug, a fireball personality that could light up the team and dynamize it.

But the immediate question mark was the faulty infield situation caused by the uncertainty about Hank Mooney's ankle and the holdout of Stan Fox. Denny Hays would have to start the approaching schedule of exhibition

games with an inner wall that not only would have one weak spot but would drop sharply in class if replacements were required.

Nick Horsaf at first, Peck Wilson at second, and Hec Turner at short were all top-flight men; but Hughie Baird, who might start at third if Mooney's ankle proved tricky and Fox remained a holdout, though a fancy fielder and good base runner, was not up to major-league requirements as a hitter. Jake Torpit, while a dangerous pinch hitter and good enough to fill in at first place if Horsaf ever needed help at that position, had seen his best days and had been slower than ever in the spring work.

All of which, Buzz continued, pointed up the unique all-around value of Stan Fox to the club. Fox could step in and do a high-class job at any infield position, even at first base; his sharp bat always made itself felt; and he would undoubtedly play third base if Mooney's ankle did not respond. Stan was taking full advantage of the situation and nobody blamed him much for doing it, since he was not getting any younger. But he had not been too diplomatic in his holdout campaign. He had bluntly invited the club to trade him; and there was a chance it might do that, even though it was hardly likely it could get a man in return who would come close to filling Stan's niche.

Eddie Horne was presently being groomed, Buzz wrote, and might be good enough, since he had obvious class in all departments of the game and had been sufficiently seasoned by minor-league play; but there had always been a peculiar lackadaisical quality to Horne's performances, due to his not having definitely made up his mind whether he wanted to be a ballplayer or follow his father's profession of medicine.

The Buffs did have, Buzz Whitney went on, one other



young fellow who wanted to play baseball; who played it so hard, in fact, that old-timers had paid him the compliment of referring to him as a throwback to the old Buffs of the Al Hartford era. But he was "green as a jungle fighter's camouflage" at third base, although he had shown some evidence of knowing his way around the shortstop position. Luke Coss, Buzz wrote, was big and fast, with a strong arm, persistent spirit, sense of humor, and plenty of what the ballplayers called "raw guts." At the plate, though, looking at big-league pitching, he had the rookie habit of hitting at too many bad ones. He did get plenty of wood on the leather and now and then hit a long ball.

Luke, narrow-eyed, read Buzz Whitney's summation:

"Coss is an earnest, likable kid with plenty of promise. He'll bear watching, for he has the makings of a ballplayer and may be, in fact, the exact type of spark plug for whom the Buffs have long been searching. But he doesn't seem to figure in the current picture one way or another, except that he may be kept around for a while to fill out the practice infields."

Luke laid the paper aside with a calmness that surprised him, considering that he had just read what amounted to a sentence. He had had a couple of lucky days which had given him some slight reason to hope, but Buzz had told him exactly where he stood. And definitely.

He thought that the players at the ball park that afternoon told him more of the same story. The regulars were friendly enough, but he was just another in a long parade of rookies who had had their moment in the white light of the press while the training camp atmosphere was jovial and the sports writers were waiting for the real ballplayers

to arrive and make news.

Even Mousey stopped riding him. The pitcher had transferred his attentions to veterans against whom he had played in the past; upon them he lavished his talents as a jockey. But a trade had made him one of them and they seemed glad to have a pitcher who could be a fifteen-game winner. They quipped with him, and had names as peculiar for him as he had for them.

Luke knew that Buzz Whitney had tried to be kind. Yet, deep down, he was hurt. It didn't help to remember that Buzz was simply writing the truth, stating a fact. As Johnny Hill had so often said, there was no use trying to dodge a fact. The thing to do with a fact was to face it and make the best of it.

O.K., Luke thought, he'd face the fact. He was here on borrowed time, filling up space until Mooney's ankle healed completely and Stan Fox signed. He was lucky to be here at all. So why worry? He'd make the best of it, enjoy himself for the rest of the time he was at the camp, and learn all he could.

This was the frame of mind in which he went to third base when they began the practice game that afternoon.

Every muscle was loose and easy, and that was the way he played. It was the first time since he had come to camp that he had felt free of pressure. He found himself enjoying the game, as baseball was meant to be enjoyed. He knocked down the first ball that came to him, picked it up, and fired a rifleshoot to first in time to throw out fast Peck Wilson by five yards. He backed up and was handcuffed by a hot one at his feet, laughed it off — and on his next chance started a double play.

There came a situation in the third inning, with men on first and second, and nobody out. Hec shuffled over to him.

"What do you do on the next play, Shakespeare, if the ball comes to you?"

"Step on third, if I can, then throw to second or first, depending on how much time."

"That's all right for a hard-hit ball; but Baird's up — he's fast and a good bunter."

"I go in for the bunt?"

"And who covers third?"

"You?"

"Not this time — I cover second and Peck first because Torpit has to go in too. This is the way. Play a little way in; try to make Baird think you're coming all the way. If it's a short bunt on your side, the pitcher will cover it and decide whether he'll throw it to you for the force. If you get the throw fast — try for the double play at first. Got it?"

"It's simple," Luke said, free and loose.

"Then do it."

Luke edged in, farther than he was supposed to go; but started back as Hughie Baird lifted his bat. It was a perfect bunt toward third. The pitcher was on it; Luke was on the bag and took the toss. He started to throw to first and saw that he couldn't get Baird. But the man who had reached second was edging off the bag, ready to break for third if he threw to first.

With a lightning motion Luke threw to second.

The runner was caught off and the run down began. He worked his way toward Luke, gambling on outsmarting the rookie.

But Johnny had always said, *Run them back to the base they left.*

Luke ran him back, faked a throw, then as the runner began to backtrack, chased him, and tagged him.

Hec tossed a handful of dirt. "You're getting too good. O.K. — now hug that bag for Nick, but deep, or he's liable to ram it down your throat."

Hank Mooney, coaching at third, was a slender, bow-legged fellow with a smiling Irish face. Now he called to Hec, "Stop coaching the guy — he already plays my bag like he owns it."

"It's the only way I can keep him from showing me up at shortstop."

Kidding the rookie, Luke thought; but it was a nice sort of kidding from a couple of nice guys, without barbs or hooks on the end of the line.

On the bench, Denny Hays, who had never bothered to take part in any of the kidding before, grinned. "Back to short this time, Luke. I'm afraid Hank will get worried and try to get in there too soon on that bad ankle."

"How about me?" Hec complained. "I've got seniority around here."

"You go to third, so Hank won't have anything to worry about."

"If you want to get rid of me, Denny, why don't you just say so?"

"I've been trying to get rid of you for years."

There it was again, Luke thought, the kind of kidding that didn't sting. Hec played third as if that had always been his position. He seemed to have that sixth sense which comes to all veteran athletes — to know, without excitement and effort, just about where the ball was going to come and what to do with it. He didn't seem to have a thought in his head, sort of stalling around as though watching the game instead of playing it. But when the ball came his way, he was there, and he handled it gently.

Luke found himself copying Hec in this as he had tried

to copy him in everything. It was easier to copy Hec at shortstop. He was more at home there, had more time to get set before the ball reached him. Old Hec was still tipping him off on where to play, what to expect, and what to do.

Luke suspected that the real reason he had not been shipped out last night might be — Hec. He found himself thinking what a fine place the world would be if everybody were like Hec, and what a troublesome place if everybody were like Mousey. Yet Mousey didn't seem to want to be a bad actor; it was just that he had peculiar ideas of having fun.

He was loose at the plate too, and got two line hits. All in all, he had a very good day. But this was, he knew, inside-the-family baseball without pressure. He wasn't part of the family — just a visitor — filling in until the two big brothers, Fox and Mooney, took their places.

Jackie spilled some more ink that afternoon. He split it into two parts, as though he were lingering over it. This was the opening paragraph:

“Any day now the rookies will be writing that traditional post card: ‘Dear Mom: I’ll be coming home soon — the pitchers started curving them today.’”

And then, far down, at the very end, came this snapper:

“I do hope the Coal Mine Kid pays me that long-promised visit before he goes home.”

*That does it,* Luke thought. *He’s asking for it.* If some rookie *did* give him a farewell kiss, maybe he wouldn't get so fresh with the next bunch that came along!

A group of rookies were coming toward him; he thought he could guess what was in their minds: They

hadn't liked that crack about the post cards.

"Read Jacky Wacky yet?" Big Jack asked.

"I read it."

"Planning on doing anything about it?"

Luke hesitated. These were his friends, but the little bell in his mind was warning him to take it easy, that there was something queer someplace. "I'm not planning on taking the next train out of town."

Sidelong glances, smiles, ran around the group. What, Luke wondered, was so funny?

Buck Shawl said, "Eddie, I think it's about time this big kid was told the facts of life."

Eddie nodded. "Luke, Jackie's a girl. That's why Mousey tried to egg you into going over to throw a punch. It would have been the laugh of the year — Luke Coss planning to smack down a girl."

"What?" Luke stared.

The others roared at the expression on his face.

"A girl?" he repeated. He looked baffled. "You're sure?"

"I heard rumors that the writer of the column was kept hidden, a newspaper secret. I nosed around and kept asking questions. I found out."

Luke nodded. He didn't ask how or where Eddie had found out. Eddie could ask questions where he couldn't. He said: "That's nice. Now I can't do anything about it."

"Who says you can't?"

"I can't fight a girl."

"You don't have to do any fighting. Remember, I said there might be a way to get both Mousey and Jackie with a chuckle. The setup is perfect if you're game to play your part. I'll explain the script while we're eating."

Eddie made the script sound simple, safe, satisfactory.



"I don't think there's any question but that Mousey's been feeding Jackie her dope. He's trying to needle you into storming into the newspaper office. You ask for Jackie, apparently all set to make him eat some of that stuff — and out walks a girl. All in a moment you're the fall guy of the year. Mousey roars. He's put over his best and biggest gag and you've fallen for it.

"Now let's twist it around. You start for the newspaper office looking for vengeance. Some of the boys go with you —"

"We all go with him," said Big Jack flatly.

"Mousey goes with you too," Eddie went on.

"How do you know he will?" Luke asked.

"Do you think he'd miss this after building up to it? He expects to see you knocked speechless when the girl comes out. Instead, you play it gallantly. You thank her for all the publicity she's been giving you and invite her to dinner. Mousey's left there with his mouth hanging open, knocked for a loop."

Luke's brow wrinkled. "There's one thing I don't understand. Why did she pick on me so much?"

"Her first paragraph was probably an accident, an aimless jest at a rookie nobody knew today and would probably forget tomorrow. Then Mousey picked it up and began to feed her stuff. She probably never thought of you as an individual but simply as somebody to kid. Some of her stuff about other people is pretty sharp. That's why the newspaper tries to keep her identity a secret."

"You're sure she's a girl?"

"According to what I hear she's a beauty."

Big Jack grinned. "If you don't want to go through with this, Luke, I'll pinch-hit for you."

Once more Luke's brow puckered with thought. "It

seems pretty kiddish if you ask me.”

“All gags are kiddish,” Eddie said impatiently. “The only man Mousey’s afraid of is the man who can outgag him, make him look like a kid. This is your chance to fix him so that he’ll never try to ride you again.”

“Easy,” Big Jack warned. “Here he comes.”

The Mouse had Jackie’s paper in his hand and was looking perturbed.

“Perfect,” Eddie said softly. “Don’t forget, Luke — let him talk you into it.”

Mousetrapping the Mouse was all at once so pleasant and enticing that Luke could no longer hear the little bell of warning. In these last few minutes it had tried to tell him to remember one simple fact — whenever a girl was involved, he could be counted on to mess it up some way.



## CHAPTER

## 12

Luke Coss walking down Main Street flanked by Big Jack Silkowski and Mousey Maynard! Luke Coss playing the part of an indignant ballplayer on his way to chastise a newspaper writer!

Rookies and regulars were strung out behind, split up so as not to attract too much attention from the evening crowd. And the person really responsible for those newspaper items was walking beside him, pretending to be his chief supporter.

"Tonight," Mousey was saying, "we serve notice on newspaper writers in general that they can't push ballplayers around. Right, Jack?"

"Right," said Big Jack.

Mousey, Luke thought, was certainly putting it on. But then, they were all putting it on. They were all following Eddie's script. Luke had pretended that he didn't want to make this visit and had allowed Mousey to persuade him. He didn't know how the regulars had wormed into the party. Probably Mousey had told them to come along or they'd miss something good. They'd picked up the party as it left the hotel. Mousey'd probably circulated his tip early in the evening and the regulars had been waiting.

It promised to be quite a night.

And then the warning bell in Luke's head began to ring again and his walk slowed down a little. Perhaps this was all working out too perfectly. Suppose, when they got there, Jackie turned out to be a man and not a girl? Suppose Eddie Horne had been fed a lot of misinformation that had fooled him completely? Suppose it was Luke Coss who was being mousetrapped?

Stop it, he told himself. He couldn't go through life suspecting that everybody was trying to play him for a goof. If that were true, there would be something wrong — he *would* be a goof. He was in this and he'd have to go through with it.

The business offices of the newspaper were on the first floor and the first floor was dark. Mousey led the way to an elevator that stopped at the editorial offices on the second floor. The crowd of rookies and regulars had ignored the elevator. As Luke followed Mousey through a corridor, he could hear them coming up the stairs.

The editorial room was big and open. Men and women at the desks were apparently used to visiting delegations; a glance and they went on with their work — all except one girl who looked up and smiled. She looked fresh enough to have written all the Jackie stuff.

Luke found himself hoping that Jackie would not be a girl. He hoped that it might be the man at a desk inside the swinging gate who looked at him with a twisted grin, just the type of man who might have written the slams.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked.

Luke said, "I'm looking for Jackie."

Rookies and regulars were edging into the room. Newspaper employees were beginning to crowd in through other doors. The men and women at the city-room desks

were beginning to pay attention. A cameraman pushed his way through the crowd.

Luke's mind cleared and grew sharp. No doubt about it now — the newspaper had been told he was coming and they were all set for a show — with pictures. O.K., they'd get one, one kind or another. He didn't care much which kind.

"Who wants to see Jackie?" the twisted grin asked.

*As though you don't know*, Luke thought. Aloud he said, "I'm Luke Coss."

The man's eyes ran over the group. "I see you brought a lot of your friends. Practically the entire ball club."

"Not quite." Luke was positive he didn't like that twisted grin.

Mousey began to throw his weight around. "Cut out the stalling. Do we see Jackie or don't we?"

A round-eyed copyboy, who had edged close to the gate, stared at the big-name ballplayers.

Luke said: "Not 'we.' *I*. I want to see Jackie."

The man seemed to droop an eyelid. "Boy, tell Jackie there's a delegation here."

Luke found the fingers of his right hand closing. Jackie had better be a girl.

A door at the rear of the city room opened. The girl who came out was the redhead of the bus.

All at once Luke wondered why he had not known that this was how it would be. Hec had been trying to tell him something — was Hec in on this? Eddie Horne? He threw the script out the window and was on his own.

"Hello," he said, and was amazed at his quietness.

If she was surprised, she did not show it. "Hello."

"You're looking lovely tonight, Miss Brannigan."

That stopped her. He knew she was stopped.

"Thank you, Mr. Coss."

"You are lovelier than the day we met on the bus."

She gave a good imitation of girl groping back into the past. "Did we meet on a bus? But you didn't come here just to tell me that?"

"No, Miss Brannigan. I came to thank you and my publicity agent, Mousey, for a swell build-up. I might have gone back home long ago if you hadn't been so kind — both of you." He glanced at Mousey.

The best the Mouse could give him was a sickly little smile. Mousey was through.

But Jackie wasn't. "I understand you were going to give me something."

Luke wished he could get out of there. She had taken the play from him, had challenged him.

"A sort of going-away present," she added.

Her eyes goaded him. "I'm not going away," he said. He knew he shouldn't be talking like this. "I'll see you again at Buff Field, if you ever get that far out of town."

The knife was out now. "Oh, I was practically born there, Mr. Coss. And if you ever get there, I'll kiss you at home plate."

At last Mousey was having his laugh.

Luke said thickly, "Why wait?" She had this coming to her.

She read his intention in his eyes and her own eyes flashed. "Don't you dare —"

He kissed her quickly and released her at once. "Put that in your column, Jackie."

There was no laughter in the room, no sound.

"I'm sorry," Luke said, almost in a whisper. He hadn't meant to say it.



She slapped his face — hard. “For that I’m not sorry,” she said clearly. She turned away, and as she went toward the door through which she had appeared, Mousey’s loud, derisive laugh broke out.

Luke whirled and went for him. He had always known he’d go for him if he made a gag of the redhead.

Somebody pinned Luke’s arms from behind. Players came between them. Mousey was making no move to break through toward him. A fresh current of anger ran through Luke and he broke from the grasp that held his arms. He lunged into the group, toward Mousey, but Big Jack blocked his path, shaking his head. Again Luke found his arms caught from behind.

A slow, deep voice said, “Easy, boy.” The voice was Hank Mooney’s.

“Let him come,” Mousey invited.

Luke tried to wrench free again and Mooney’s chest pushed hard against him. “Back up before I have to spank you.”

“Maybe you could,” Luke panted, “but the Mouse can’t.”

“Boy,” said Mooney, “I wouldn’t want to try. I don’t think the Mouse would either.”

Mousey was permitting himself to be led away. Jackie had disappeared and the newspaper people were scattering.

“Suppose,” Eddie Horne said, “we all go for a Coke.” He, Big Jack, and Buck Shawl went out with Luke.

“Did you know I had met her before?” Luke demanded of Eddie.

“Did you?” The question was its own answer.

Luke was instantly cautious. “I saw her once on a bus — that’s all.”

Walking restlessly and alone through the town that night, Luke had plenty of time to think. Would he and Mousey fight it out tomorrow? What would Denny Hays think of a rookie challenging a regular, in a newspaper office of all places, and just before the exhibition games were to start and another player cut was due? What would the newspaper do about it, and what would Jackie Brannigan do? Should he start packing his trunk?

He walked into the hotel, and Hec rose from a chair in a corner of the lobby. He knew Hec had been waiting for him, probably waiting a long time.

"Ever try a frozen malted, pal?" Hec led the way toward the drugstore. "There's one thing I always wanted to see and I missed it."

"What's that?"

"A mouse in the act of stepping on his tail. But nobody ever tells me things."

"How much is told me?" For the first time Luke was bitter toward Hec. "Why didn't you let me know who Jackie was?"

"Didn't you know?"

"Do you think I'd have gone there if I had known?"

"I wondered about that. Maybe Mousey didn't let me in on this for fear I'd tip you off. Didn't you hear me say something about red hair from time to time?"

"What did that have to do with Jackie?"

"I tried to tell you — I thought you knew Jackie and Red Brannigan were the same person."

"I thought you were trying to pump me and find out something."

"I was. I thought you didn't want to tell."

"I didn't. Anyhow, there was nothing to tell. I saw her on the bus; I didn't speak to her."

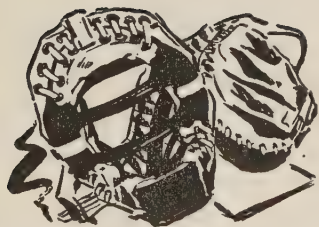
Hec seemed to ponder that. "Well, like I always say, women are funny people. Mary Brannigan says Red had her eyes on you all the way down in the bus."

That gave Luke something to ponder. It was pleasant pondering.

"What was it she hit you with, pal, a right or a left?"

"A right. I never saw it coming."

"Just like her old man," Hec said in admiration.



## CHAPTER

### 13

Luke awoke next morning with the thought that today

he'd have to fight Mousey.

Hec was still sleeping. He went downstairs, bought a paper, and found his hands trembling as he scanned the pages quickly. One worry died. There was not a line about the scene in the city room, not a word about a fight between two of the Buff players. Neither was there anything in Jackie's column. Headlines said that Hank Mooney would give his ankle its first test today in preparation for the exhibition games that would begin later in the week.

Luke was one of the first in the dining room. He ordered, began to read the paper, and felt a hand on his shoulder. His body tensed and he almost jumped to his feet.

The hand belonged to Willie Herman, the trainer. "Hi, Champ! Up early this morning?"

Luke had always been able to talk freely to Willie. "Thought I'd get my trunk packed in case I was given a ticket for the noon train."

Willie looked concerned. "You heard anything?"

"Not yet."

"If it's last night you're worried about, relax. You

didn't do yourself any harm. This club can do with the right kind of fight." Willie's round face became alert. "Here comes your sparring partner."

Luke sat still, ready for anything. When he felt another hand on his shoulder, he turned slowly, unsmilingly, just as tense.

Mousey, with a wide grin, lifted his hand to Luke's head and rumbled his hair, almost with affection. "Guess we gave them a good floor show last night, eh, Shortstop?"

Luke was relieved. If Mousey wanted to play it friendly, that was fine. But he'd never again take from the pitcher what he'd taken in the past.

"Guess we did," he answered.

Mousey sat down. "Hello, Willie. How's Arnica-and-Bandages this morning?"

Willie's smile was resigned as though the joke was growing thin. "Next time you boys put on an act let a fellow know. From what I hear it must have been good."

"Good? It was great. Shortstop here is a born actor. I gave him the cue and he got it in a flash, like that." Mousey snapped his fingers briskly. He did everything briskly.

Luke wondered just what cue Mousey was supposed to have passed him.

"Shortstop took Jackie off her feet with the unexpected. Then, wham — she let him have it. Didn't know what to do after that, did you, Shortstop?"

"I certainly didn't." There was no harm in being honest.

Mousey chuckled to Willie. "I saw he was in a tough spot and I had to get him out of it. I gave with a big laugh. Shortstop caught the cue and made out he was tearing into me. Mooney held him and I let the others

move me out of there.”

“Like that, eh?” Willie regarded the Mouse with slow admiration. He gave Luke an understanding nod.

Denny Hays was walking toward them with a non-committal sort of stare. Luke began to quake inside.

The quick-thinking Mousey went into action fast. “Morning, Denny. Hear about the floor show Shortstop and I put on last night? We really panicked them.”

Denny Hays wasn’t exactly panicked. “Next time you boys put on an act you’d better pick a different stage,” he said dryly. He turned to Luke. “Ever play first base?”

“No, sir.”

“Try it today. Nick will give you some pointers.” He walked away and Willie Herman looked after him with owl eyes that said this might mean anything. Nick Horsaf had come in and Mousey was waving him to the table. The pitcher went into his routine about the floor show.

A finger gave Luke a sign: Nick was letting Mousey get away with it. Probably that was the best way out for everybody. The Mouse had been trapped the night before, but he was easing out of the trap skillfully. He was the big hero who had pulled Luke from the trap.

Well, Luke thought, *perhaps Mousey had.*

Mousey explained the floor show to every new person who came in. The players, Luke saw, were surprised to see them together, skeptical about the explanation, mostly; but some of them really seemed to swallow it, perhaps because Mousey himself had said it so often that he now seemed to believe it himself.

Luke played his part in this new act, but his mind was already on other things. What did Denny Hays have in mind about trying him at first base? It might be a good sign, as Willie Herman seemed to think; or it might just



mean that Denny was finding something for him to be busy at. There would be no room at third base any longer, now that Hank Mooney was back on the job with Hughie Baird to back him up. No room at shortstop with Hec and Eddie there. No room at first with such an old head as Jake Torpit around to sub for Nick Horsaf who, like Hec Turner, was indestructible.

And when Stan Fox finally signed, as many of the players figured he would eventually do, there would be no room for any more fifth wheels. When Stan did sign, the only other infielder who might possibly be carried with the club was Eddie Horne.

However, being young, Luke couldn't help hoping; and being a fighter, he just had to play out the string until the final ball was pitched. Somebody *might* fumble.

As the Buffs approached the exhibition season with other big-league clubs, the atmosphere became more serious around the camp. The more serious it became, the lower Luke drifted in the scheme of things. Hank Mooney's ankle seemed to be all right, though he hadn't yet given it the acid test of really forgetting it had been hurt. He covered third, more with his head and hands than his feet, managed to be in the right spot, but was careful to avoid quick starts and stops.

At the plate he did not dig in too hard. He hit well, but he loped rather than ran and he never attempted a slide. He played only a few innings in his first few games but gradually added to the innings. Denny Hays seemed to be allowing him to decide how far he could extend himself.

Willie Herman watched the third baseman as though he were a brittle treasure and tenderly massaged the ankle after every workout.

Luke observed all this carefully. Hank was a nice guy, a fine player, and the club needed him. He kept telling himself he must think of what was good for the club and for Hank; and not of what might be best for him. But he knew that when Hank *did* let go, and if the ankle stood up under it, that old train whistle would blow for him.

There were times after the exhibition games started, when he found himself hoping that it would blow. He had rehearsed what he would say and how he would act. He'd take it with a smile, go around and shake hands with everybody as the first five rookies had done, thank them for being so swell to him, even the Mouse. The Mouse was now having a wonderful time riding the other clubs. Rival players came back at him with all sorts of names, including a new one, "Jacky Wacky"; but the Mouse had duck feathers that seemed to shed every form of abuse.

Luke found the players from other teams friendly enough. They had read of some of his bouts with the Mouse and gave him credit for holding up his own end pretty well. But he was not important — just a rookie up for a look. And if sometimes they seemed to wonder what was holding him up so long, Luke didn't blame them because, more and more as the days went by, he was wondering too.

He hadn't seen Jackie since the night at the newspaper. He had seen her mother, and Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Hays, and they were all nice to him. But if he never saw Jackie, she never allowed him to forget her. She had so many cracks in her column about him that the other rookies now called it Coss's Column. But there was a change — her paragraphs about him were gentler, without acid. And he was no longer "the Coal Mine Kid." He had become "the Fifth Wheel," three words that had been running through

his own disturbed mind.

She followed his fifth-wheel travels around the diamond, for he was having his daily workouts in the practice sessions at first, and short, occasionally at second, and more rarely at third. He didn't do too badly at first or second, and he always felt as if he were back home when he got to kicking the dirt around short; but at third he was still uncertain, never too sure what he was going to do, and always remembering those first horrible experiences.

He was no ball of fire at the plate, but not quite a washout either. Denny Hays let him take his turn in the hitting practices. The pitchers were now coming up with more speed and curves as their arms rounded into shape. Denny had a different theory from that of most managers about batting practice. The usual method was to let some coach toss the balls up there so that the players would have fat stuff to hit at. But Denny figured that pitchers should be pitching to batters and batters hitting at pitchers, even in the workouts.

Luke was looking at real big-league stuff. He was gradually cutting down his swinging range and concentrating on watching the ball from the time it left the pitcher's hand until he could "count the stitches and read the label." Hec had had him shorten his swing, give it more of the DiMaggio wrist action, since Luke had such strong forearms; and Nick Horsaf had advised him to stand farther back in the box, as Hornsby had.

He began to hit line drives instead of smothered hops or high pops; and now and then he really corked one to what Big Jack called "parts unknown." The curves still gave him trouble, and he constantly had to restrain himself

from reaching for those high ones he loved, but speed didn't bother him at all. The faster they came up, the harder they went back, the better the bat felt when he connected. He got so he could tell by the feel in his forearms just how well he had hit the ball. And he had practically no fear up there since he had adopted the Hornsby stance because he was no longer hugging the line of flight to the strike zone.

Hank Mooney, who was the bunter and slide expert of the club, took him in hand. At the hearts sessions, at mealtime, in the room at night, and on the bench, he was given tips about everything — especially fielding, the little things that made the hard ones easy. He felt that he was in school again with many, many teachers.

During the exhibition games he watched the big-leaguers from the other teams, but always he found his eyes drifting back to shortstop. He was a shortstop at heart and he knew nobody was ever really going to change him from that. He thought about shortstop as he thought about his home and his town and his high-school team — and about the Buffs.

He no longer felt like a guest but as one of the team, as a member of the family instead of a waif brought in from the streets. He listened to the talk of the important events ahead, the exhibition game with the Wolves, the big barbecue the town always put on just before camp was broken, the road trip to other cities en route to Opening Day at Buff Field. He didn't expect to see Opening Day. It was going to be awfully tough when that train came around the bend; but he knew the whistle must sound soon.

He tried not to think about it during the day, but it

came in his dreams, which were more and more of home, of his mother and Johnny Hill and Miss Ellison — and of the mines. Like all boys away from home for the first time, and finding things strange and hard after the first excitement had passed, he was getting another dose of plain, old-fashioned homesickness.

Hec noticed it, and touched it in his left-handed way. "If I keep sleeping well, I might be able to stick with the club all season."

"You'd better get ready to break in a new roommate, Hec."

"Think I broke you in just to lose you? You just keep on doing like you've been doing — and forget about tomorrow. Sometimes it never comes."

But tomorrow did come — the very next day.

In the fourth inning of the Yankee game Hank Mooney hit a long one just inside the left-field foul line, rounded first with a full head of steam, made for second and hit the dirt.

Every man on the bench leaped to his feet without a word.

As one man they gave a mighty yell of relief. Hank had gotten up, was shaking his right fist at the bench, the signal that his ankle had stood the test.

Luke found himself yelling with the rest — though he heard in the cheer the first faint sound of his train whistle.

The whistle grew louder that afternoon when Stan Fox came to camp, unannounced. He had not signed, but everybody was sure that ironing out the final details would be nothing more than a formality.

After practice Luke went up to his room. There would be no longer an excuse for keeping him. The only question would be: Would the ticket the club secretary handed

him be for home or to some minor-league club?

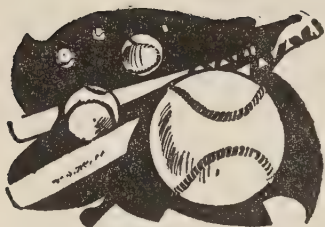
The phone rang.

He hesitated for a moment before picking it up.

The call was not from the club secretary giving him the bad news.

Johnny Hill was downstairs in the lobby.





## CHAPTER

### 14

Never, it seemed to Luke, had an elevator taken so long to drop down to the lobby. Impatient, he crowded the elevator door and was the first passenger to step out when the car stopped. He had expected Johnny Hill to be waiting, but there was no sign of the man who had shaped so much of his destiny. Over at the desk Kenny Smith and a group of players were talking to somebody who was spotlessly dolled up in a Palm Beach suit, white shoes, and a straw hat with a gay ribbon. Whoever the immaculate one was, he was causing a stir. Luke saw Hec join the group and, a moment later, shake hands with the creator of all this interest. Then the stranger turned, and Luke saw his face and let out a shout.

“Johnny! Johnny Hill!”

The small crowd opened and Johnny came through, his face beaming. “Hi, son!” He didn’t look so old and the habitual stoop had gone out of his shoulders.

Kenny Smith said: “I recognized him at once from his photograph and spoke to him. The one and only Johnny Hill. The Buffs’ Number One rooter.”

“I recognized him too,” said Hec Turner. “Two bell-boys helped me out of a chair and I managed to crawl

over. Just had strength enough to hold out my hand."

"Old Dying-on-His-Feet," Kenny Smith gibed. "Tomorrow he'll go out and bust a couple of pretties right out of the park."

"And probably collapse rounding first," Hec groaned. "It's a tough world, Johnny. The young squirts come in and push you around and you begin to hope the chow's good at the old folks' home."

Christmas, Luke reflected, might not be coming for him, but today it had certainly come for Johnny Hill. Johnny was like a kid before his first tree, his eyes big with wonder. More players joined the group and Luke introduced Johnny around and watched the wonder grow in his eyes. These were the ornaments on his tree, these players he had worshiped at a distance.

Kenny Smith had gone to the house telephones. Now he came back. "Johnny, I don't want to crowd you and Luke today, but how about giving me some time tomorrow."

"Any time you say," Johnny told him.

"You see," Hec said, "as soon as I shake hands with somebody he becomes important and Kenny Smith wants to do a story about him."

"Hey!" Johnny was alarmed. "This isn't going to be a newspaper interview?"

"Of course not," Hec soothed. "He wants to get your recipe for chocolate fudge." He punched playfully at Johnny's ribs. "All right, pal; take him away and monopolize him. It'll probably be your last chance."

Luke led the way toward the lobby chairs. It was still unbelievable that Johnny was here. The past came flooding back and his heart swelled.

"The one thing I wanted," he said huskily, "was to see you. There hasn't been a day I haven't thought about you

and the things you told me. How are you? How's Mom? How's Miss Ellison?"

Johnny chuckled. "I'm fine, and your Mom's fine, and Miss Ellison's fine. But when I get back they'll want to hear about you. How goes it?"

"All right, I guess."

Johnny looked at him sharply. "You worrying?"

Luke hesitated. "Well —"

"You think the Buffs'd kept you around this long just to pay your hotel bills?"

Luke thought: *There's more to it than that. There's Mooney and Hec and Eddie Horne and Hughie Baird. The Buffs have so much talent that boys without experience are a dime a dozen.* But he smiled at Johnny and let Johnny take from the smile whatever he wanted.

An elevator door opened and Denny Hays stepped out into the lobby and stood looking about as though definitely searching for somebody.

Luke's stomach felt as though it were sinking into his shoes. He had a hunch Denny was looking for him. If that were so, it was going to be tough on Johnny, wandering in just as the ax fell, coming to training camp only to turn around and go back again — perhaps with a discarded rookie.

Luke knew the moment the manager saw him. Denny came across the lobby and Luke swallowed a lump in his throat. In a way, it would be a relief to hear whatever he had to be told, but he didn't want to be told it in front of Johnny.

Denny took a step past him. "You're Johnny Hill, aren't you? I'm Denny Hays. Why didn't you write and tell me you were coming? I wouldn't know you were here if Kenny Smith hadn't phoned my room. Welcome to the

Bufs, and I mean welcome."

"Thanks, Denny." Johnny Hill's voice sounded the way Luke had never heard it sound before and the aging eyes were watery. After all these years — welcome to the Bufs. No matter what happened now, Johnny had had his big thrill. *Welcome to the Bufs!*

Hec came over from the desk. "There they are, Denny, the guy you made me room with and the guy who sent him here. Which one do I shoot first?"

The manager gave his star shortstop an absent grin. "How long will you be with us, Johnny?"

"I don't know. I just wanted to see Luke and the team, so I took an early vacation."

"We break camp in another week. Why don't you stay down as a guest of the club?"

Johnny looked both startled and pleased. "You don't have to do that."

"We want to; we owe you a lot. I'll see that you're fixed up with a room. Sign your dining-room checks. Take care of him, Hec."

"You think you have to tell me?" Hec demanded. "You ever see one old Buff who didn't take care of another old Buff?" He aimed another punch at Johnny's ribs.

Hec dropped into a chair, and he and Johnny began to talk as though they had been friends for years instead of men who had met that day for the first time. Johnny's Christmas was growing bigger by the minute. The sinking chill that had crept into Luke as Denny's eyes had searched the lobby had passed off. He would be here until the team broke camp. The manager had invited Johnny to stay that long and Denny would not have done that had he intended to send away a kid from the coal mines Johnny had traveled so far to see.

After that — Well, Luke didn't know. At least, he wasn't sure. He was beginning to see things with a clearer logic. While it could happen — probably anything could happen in baseball — it wasn't likely that the club would hold him until the very end of the training camp and then cut him loose. Johnny was right — they weren't *that* fond of paying a rookie's hotel bills. He was going to be sent to a Buff farm. His new hope was that the club he'd play with this year wouldn't be in a league classification so low that it would take him a long time to work up to the big league.

Late that night he wrote to his mother:

“Johnny is certainly being repaid for all his years of loyalty to the Buffs. There's always half a dozen of them around him, and he and Hec Turner get along as though they were raised together. Tonight, in the dining room, they took a picture of Johnny surrounded by about the whole team of regulars. Tomorrow he's being interviewed, and they're taking a picture of him in a Buff uniform. If he doesn't start crying I'll be surprised, and if he does, I think I'll be bawling with him.

“When I came up from the lobby, though don't tell this to Miss Ellison, I left Johnny with Mrs. Barton, the wife of the scout who signed me, and Mrs. Brannigan, the widow of Mike Brannigan, who was some ballplayer. Johnny remembered Mike's whole record and Mrs. Brannigan loved him.”

Luke sat with his pen poised. Presently he went on without having told his mother that Mrs. Brannigan had a redheaded daughter.

“He ought to have plenty to talk about when he gets back on the mail route. The club has made him

its guest and he'll be here until the camp breaks up. Tomorrow we play the Wolves, and just before the finish here the town will give us a barbecue and wish us luck for the year."

That Wolves game would be special, Luke thought, because Johnny, in one day, would enjoy the great love of his life and the great hate, both on the field before him. Johnny couldn't really hate anybody. His hatred of the Wolves was a fan hatred. He was anti-Wolves because the Wolves were anti-Buffs.

The next day proved to be more than Luke could have imagined.

Johnny Hill, looking as though he couldn't believe that it had happened, was on the bench in a Buff uniform — but Stan Fox was not. A feverish grapevine brought the rumor that Stan had had a long talk with Denny Hays the day before. He had refused to lighten his demands, even though Denny had, no doubt working on instructions from the front office, offered to split the difference between what the club offered and Stan had asked. The grapevine added that Stan had been willing to work out, so that he could be in shape, not anything unusual in the deals of holdout players with their clubs. But Denny had refused permission to work out unless Stan signed, and had told the infielder that if he stayed in town it would have to be at his own expense.

Stan had left that morning.

As the day wore on, Luke discovered that the grapevine had been right. An early afternoon newspaper confirmed the story. Stan, he learned, had said good-by to the regulars and there had been a finality about that



good-by. Naturally, he had the sympathy of the players — some of them might be battling the club about salary next spring. And yet the players thought that Stan had timed it badly. Knowing Hank Mooney was in camp — the newspapers had reported that — he should have checked in at once, before Hank's ankle had stood the sliding test. With Hank in shape, Stan should have accepted the club's offer, which would have given him a pay check larger than at least four of the other regulars were being paid.

Luke knew that Stan, all unknowing, had done him a good turn. With Stan gone, there was a possibility that he might fit in. After all, the club had to have players and they had been holding on to him. If they traded Stan to another club for another third baseman, it would be a case of trading away a player they knew they weren't going to be able to sign — a sort of get-the-best-they-could trade. The new third baseman might not fit into the Buff infield. And the team had a rookie from the coal mines on whom they had been holding a tight string, a rookie who was still here.

Luke found himself beginning to believe there might be something in what Hec had said — that he was one of those rookies with nine lives who bobbed up every so often. Well, if he were, he had already used up many of them, but he still had some left. He'd make the most of them.

But even a cat ran out of lives.



## CHAPTER

### 15

Luke had never gone in for plain or fancy psychology, a ten-letter word he didn't know much about except that it sometimes came up in crossword puzzles. But he thought he understood, that afternoon, why the Buffs and the Wolves went at each other as though the game would decide the pennant. And yet it was a game that would never figure in the averages or the league standing. It was important because it was the first of many meetings between these teams, meetings that would go on during the season when the chips were down and every game went into the record. Each team wanted to get off on top, to get in the first punch, to see who was going to be boss.

It was big-league baseball in earnest.

The pitchers were bearing down, the hitters were taking their cuts, the fielders were coming up with them, the base runners were running everything out, the jockeys were going to town. Up to today the Buffs had seemed to be a businesslike, live-and-let-live crowd, but Mousey was waking them up. Some of the stuff that passed back and forth was rough — very rough — Luke thought, and he was glad nobody was yelling such words at him.

He knew the answer — he wasn't important enough to

bother with. Neither were the other rookies, for that matter, but they were whooping it up. They had been through this sort of thing in the minor leagues and it came easily from them and seemed all right. Luke thought it would be out of place for him to ride big-leaguers. He thought he would feel silly, like a kid shouting just to be heard.

Johnny was quiet too. Luke sat next to Johnny in one corner of the bench as if he were in a theater watching a picture, as if it couldn't be possible that Johnny Hill, the mailman, was actually on the Buff bench in a Buff uniform. Luke remembered the time he and Johnny had watched the Buffs in Pittsburgh, and Johnny had hatched a plot and worked out the details that were to be climaxed when, years later, Luke played at Buff Field.

Well, here they were, with Buff Field less than three weeks away. Yet the possibility that he would be with the club on Opening Day now seemed even more fantastic to Luke than it had seemed when he was a kid. True, he was with the club, but he had had a lot of unusual breaks and had had the best of some lucky situations, none of which had much to do with his ability. The proof of that was that Denny Hays had not thought enough of him to put him in an exhibition game against a big-league club.

So Luke and Johnny watched the game as if they were sitting in the stands.

It was a good game to watch. After five innings the pitchers were changed; no pitcher was yet ready to go the distance. There had been few changes in the other positions. The teams battled along, tied at 2 all, until the first of the eighth when, with one away, Ted Dupre, the Buff hurler, suddenly lost his control and walked Hack Garza on four pitched balls. He threw two more balls to the next batter and the Wolves' fans in the crowd and the Wolves

on the bench began whooping it up.

Luke leaned forward, tense. It looked like the break in the game. If the Buffs were to lose with old Johnny on the bench, it would be like pushing over his Christmas tree.

The next ball came up fast — and the batter swung. In his eagerness he topped it a little, but it still looked like one of those bounders that would skip by second base. Peck Wilson went after it, snared it with his bare hand back of the sack, and threw with almost the same motion to Hec. Hec took the throw, side-stepped niftily and leaped in the air, like a jump passer in football, and got the ball to first in time to complete a double play by a whisker. But Garza piled into Hec — seemed to go out of his way to do it — and Hec went down. He didn't get up.

Luke, on his feet as the play began, started running toward second. The crowd were booing and players were pouring from both benches.

Luke reached Garza first, caught his arm, swung him around. "You did that on purpose."

"Who are you?" But Garza didn't wait for the answer. He let go with a left hook that grazed Luke's jaw.

Luke's right fist shot out with everything it had accumulated during the training season — all he had saved for Mousey, for Jackie, if Jackie had been a man —

Garza went down.

After that things happened fast. Players were coming at him and he was fighting them off. He hit and got hit.

Hec, on his feet, was there, punching like a buzz saw, grinning while he fought. Mousey was in it, yelling joyfully, punching manfully.

Then it stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

Bill Jenkins, the two managers, and the local police herded the players of both teams back to their benches.

They all seemed willing enough to be herded, including Luke. But he laughed when he saw that old Johnny had been right out there in the middle of it all.

News of the first Buff-Wolves "rhubarb" of the year got headlines around the baseball world. And pictures. The photographers had caught the major part of the melee with six separate fights going on at the same time, and the peacemakers as busy as the fighters. It was big news for the writers.

The long-missing Buff spark had been provided, Kenny Smith wrote, by the same pair who had enlivened the training season with their semicomical feud — the irrepressible Mousey Maynard and the unpredictable Luke Coss. Kenny retold some of the incidents that had threatened to involve these two in battle, but added that they had obviously been charging their batteries for a common enemy. The Wolves, totally unprepared for the rough reception, had definitely come off second best, with rough-and-tumble Hack Garza as the chief victim. But the Wolves would have their own batteries charged by the opening game of the season when the teams would next meet.

There was only one flaw in this promising picture, Kenny continued — the fact that the lad who had begun the fistic festivities would probably be marked absent on Opening Day. Young men just did not come up to the big leagues and stick there without minor-league experience. A few, yes, like Mel Ott; but Ottie had been a unique case — McGraw had recognized an unusual talent which he wanted to personally develop. Invariably the rookies had to get the rough spots rubbed off and the shine put on by daily contact in the hard school of the minor

leagues. There was usually no other way.

Yet, Kenny Smith wrote, he was beginning to wonder. Luke Coss was neither a freak, a clown, nor a fresh rookie, but a likable, serious-minded kid who had set his goal early and had worked for it. He seemed to have two qualities of the great athlete — he did the right thing in the pinch *instinctively*; and he played his best ball when the chips were down — as he had proved after Denny Hays, evidently following a hunch, had put him in at short to replace Hec Turner, whose leg had been bruised by Garza's spikes. Luke had turned in two sharp plays in the lone inning he had worked, and had been the pivot man in the double play that had snuffed out the last-inning Wolves rally and closed out the game.

The fact was, Kenny Smith concluded, Luke Coss was already a better than good country ballplayer. He had things to learn, but was so eager for instruction and so quick to learn that older men wanted to teach him. He had had the good fortune to room with and become the protégé of the master, Hec Turner. Beyond all that, and before all that, the boy loved the Buffs.

*That* was no accident either, Kenny wrote. And now he told the complete story of the old man in the Buff uniform who also loved the Buffs, and whom the Buffs loved, particularly after they'd found him among them on the battlefield, ready to fight for them. Prior to the "rhubarb" this old man had probably never had anything worse than a smile for any human being in all his previous life.

Smith ended his story with the statement that he had never been one to advise a manager — except on such rare occasions as when he had campaigned to get Miller Huggins to put another young fellow in the regular line-up — a fellow named Lou Gehrig. He was not trying



to influence Denny Hays now about Luke Coss because the kid would probably be much better off playing every day in a minor league than learning by sitting on a big-league bench.

Kenny said he was just putting this prediction into the record. When, as, and if Hec Turner ever did quit the position, the Buffs had their shortstop for the next baseball generation.

While Kenny was making this notation for posterity, Luke was in bed, staring at the beam of light on the ceiling with one eye while he held a towel, filled with ice, on the other. He was calm in his mind because he had given up trying to figure himself out.

One minute he had been very quiet on that bench — and the next had found him taking on the Wolves infield. Bill Jenkins had said: “If you were in this game, I would have to put you out. Don’t ever try it in my league.” The worst part of the situation was that Luke had been wrong; Garza had been technically entitled to what he had done. Nobody had exactly told Luke he shouldn’t have started the fight. Mousey had patted him on the back: “Garza won’t be so free with that stuff if he knows there’s somebody around with guts enough to clip him.”

Even Johnny Hill hadn’t criticized Luke for acting before he thought, which was one of Johnny’s favorite topics; but this time Luke knew Johnny had also forgotten to think first.

That night Hec chuckled quietly in the darkness. “Us old ballplayers are going to get out a petition.”

“About what?” Luke asked.

“About young guys getting us into fights.”

“You didn’t do so bad.”

"Bertha catch you tonight?"

"No — I saw her first."

"She just wanted to hug you."

Luke grunted.

After a long pause Hec said, "I've heard of it, but never really saw a guy do it before."

"What?"

"Fight his way into the line-up. It's usually the other way round. Fight — and you're out."

"That's what Bill Jenkins said."

"Jersey City is in Bill's league."

"I'm not going to Jersey City."

"Who said you were? I just said it was in Bill's league."

"Are you trying to tell me I might have a chance of going to Jersey City?"

"Did I mention Jersey City?"

"Sure you did."

"Not that way. Better go back to sleep."

Luke couldn't go to sleep.

Jersey City! AA ball and AA pay! A top minor-league team, the senior class for rookies.

Eddie Horne had played for Jersey City last year. If Hec were not kidding, it might mean that the Buffs were going to trade Stan Fox, keep Eddie for Stan's spot as general utility man, and *maybe* give a kid from the coal mines a chance to make good at Jersey City.

Perhaps it could happen and perhaps it couldn't. An AA league seemed too high for a rookie without experience. But it was a wonderful dream.



## CHAPTER

### 16

The only time Luke had ever seen anything resembling the setting of the good-bye barbecue was in the movies. It was an all-day affair, held on a lush, landscaped estate equipped with its own tennis courts and swimming pool. The players were free to pick their own amusements and some of them went off to the golf course of an adjoining country club. Luke had always thought that a barbecue meant beef and only beef, but the outdoor tables held superbly prepared foods in magnificent variety. And the leading citizens of the town, the moneyed people, were everywhere, seemingly having as good a time as the players.

"Well," Big Jack said dryly, "I'm in society at last. I never thought I'd see the day."

"Like it?" Buck Shawl asked.

Big Jack said: "It's a little too fast for me. I feel as though I don't belong."

"You belong any place you want to belong," Eddie Horne told him. "Don't go getting an inferiority complex."

"What's that?" Big Jack asked.

"Don't kid me; you know what it is." Eddie was smiling.

“When you ridicule people who have more than you have, it’s a sign of envy or jealousy.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” the first baseman said after a moment. Big Jack didn’t take much from anybody, but he took it from Eddie, perhaps because of the smile.

Luke wondered if he was jealous of this show of wealth. Certainly he didn’t feel any more comfortable than Jack did. Up until today he had always been with people he knew, those with whom he had a common interest, like the people at home or the players on the Buffs. These society people were friendly — very friendly — but he just didn’t know what to say to them. When he felt that way, he always froze up. Johnny Hill was the day’s surprise. Johnny was circulating freely and talking freely, poised and at ease. Perhaps — The thought struck Luke almost with surprise. Perhaps Johnny was at ease because he was just himself and wasn’t thinking about the people here in terms of money or background.

Luke envied Eddie Horne. Here was a boy who could talk to anybody. Eddie never froze up or blew up, and his friendly smile was its own passport. One thing, Luke thought, was sure. If he was going to be among people in the upper brackets, he would have to study Eddie and learn from him, exactly as he had studied baseball and had learned from Hec.

Luke ate with a group of rookies. The rookies were staying together today, their last day together. Some would leave tonight, some would leave in the morning, but by tomorrow they would all have scattered to minor-league clubs that were Buff farms. That is, all except him. He was the only rookie who had not been given his orders and his transportation. He still didn’t know where he was going or whether he was going anyplace. It didn’t

seem to add up and make sense.

He walked off with Big Jack, trying to find a solution to the mystery. It was a mystery. Why, of all the rookies who had reported for spring training, should he be the only one still with the team, the only one left unassigned? Didn't the Buffs want him? Didn't anybody want him?

Big Jack said, "Well, well; and look who's here."

Luke turned his head quickly. Jacqueline Brannigan was here, playing tennis with Eddie Horne — a graceful, swift-moving Jackie who brought a low whistle of appreciation from Big Jack.

"That redhead's a competitor, Luke," he said in an undertone. "She's giving that game everything she's got."

Luke could see that she was fighting for every shot and making some of them only because she did fight to make them. Eddie was the better player, but he was showing the same weakness here that he showed in baseball — he wasn't playing an all-out game. There wasn't a driving will to win. Eddie had once used a word in describing his father that Luke thought also fitted the son. The word was "contained." Eddie admired that quality in his father and had probably copied it and practiced it. Eddie never blew up because within himself he was contained — too contained.

Suddenly Luke knew that what he remembered best about his own father was a calm, even temper. In a hard mining world of tough men his father had been tough, but had kept that toughness controlled. Perhaps, if his father had lived, he would have learned from him how better to control himself.

Johnny Hill had tried to teach him control. Control was about everything. A pitcher could have plenty of stuff on the ball, plenty of speed and curves, but it was mostly no



good if he were wild and lacked control. Mousey had certain good qualities: he was aggressive and fun-loving — but he lacked control of his fun ball and got himself into trouble. Then there was Johnny Hill. Johnny was Johnny, that and nothing more, and everybody seemed to like him because he was Johnny. He was a nice guy who had never tried to be a tough guy. Perhaps Johnny'd have made out better if he had been a little tougher; the time, for instance, he had had his chance to go with the Buffs. What happened to you if you had too much control of yourself? Did your worries and your mads have to come out some other way?

Luke was lost in thought, forgetful of the tennis match and of a redheaded girl. Perhaps Bill Jenkins had the answer. Relax! Nobody had to have more control during the season than an umpire. Jenkins had control when he needed it and knew when to relax and rest. He hadn't attended the barbecue; the public would be present. To the public he always had to be an umpire, and an umpire did not mingle with the players. Jenkins had said good-by that morning. "So long, Luke. Don't forget what I told you; no fights. You start swinging your fists and I'll have to throw you out. When I'm calling them back of the plate, remember what I told you. Watch the ball until you can read the label."

"You won't be calling them on me," Luke said ruefully.

"Still riding that horse?"

"You're working in an AA league. How often does a boy without any minor-league experience jump into AA company?"

"Not often," the umpire admitted, "but it isn't often a kid comes along — All right; skip it. You won't be play-



ing AA this year. But when I'm working a game you're in, don't let me hear you calling me Old Red Puss. I know that's my name among the players, but they don't let me hear them. You let me hear it out of you and I'll give you the thumb." He'd held out his hand.

Big Jack's voice brought Luke out of his reverie. "Did you see her try for that one?"

Luke's mind came back to the tennis game. Some of Red's strength was gone and she was slower. He felt sorry for her; she was trying so hard. He wanted to get away before the match ended.

"Come on, Jack; let's move."

"Aren't you going to say good-by to her?" Big Jack asked, surprised. "Stick around."

Luke shook his head and started to move. He had met Jackie twice and both meetings had been explosive. He would gladly have said good-by to her in some quiet spot on the estate, but not here. She had seen him and probably hated to lose with him around, figuring that he'd gloat. He wanted no more explosions.

He drifted to the swimming pool. The afternoon was running away and the pool was deserted. Trunks were available; on the spur of the moment he decided to take a swim.

He dove from the high board and swam underwater, came up for a gulp of air, and submerged again like a walrus. It made him feel great and seemed to wash worry out of him. He went over on his back in a calm, effortless float.

Somebody grabbed his ankles, and his feet went up and his head went under. He got a stinging noseful of water. Thinking this was a Mousey trick, he kicked loose and came up with but one thought — retaliation. He shook

water from his eyes, and then all thought of retaliation left him.

The swimmer who had ducked him was Jackie.

Her eyes seemed to hold an almost savage glee. "I've wanted to do something like that ever since that night in the office."

He dove for her, but she slipped to one side. One hand momentarily caught her arm. She splashed water in his face and broke free.

"You'll have to catch me, rookie."

"All right, rookie writer."

They went the length of the pool and back again and he couldn't catch her. She was a fish.

Luke gave up, climbed to the raft, and sat there looking at her. She played in the water at a safe distance. It seemed incredible that at last he was this close to her and that there were no explosions.

"We have a bet," he said. "Remember?" He saw by her face that she did remember. "I'm saving that."

"Looks as though you'll save it for a long time." She climbed to the raft and sat near him, kicking her feet in the water.

"How come you're here?" Luke asked.

"Your friend Johnny. He gave me a sales talk. He said he's never understood women and that you were a dope in the same way."

"He never said I was a dope."

"Well, you are. And I don't like that rookie-writer crack."

"I didn't like a lot of the rookie writer's cracks."

"Some of them were pretty raw," Jackie admitted, and did not look at him.

"Why did you start on me? I was never able to under-

stand that. Tell me why."

"Johnny's right; you don't understand women. When a girl rides on a bus with a boy and he gives her a superior sneer —"

"I was smiling at you."

"Is that what you call a smile?"

Luke said, "So you did notice me," and saw the color creep up into her face.

A heron flew across the pool and disappeared toward the sea. Jackie's feet were almost motionless in the water.

"In the beginning," she said, still not looking at him, "I wanted to hurt you. Then I wanted to build you up."

"Why?"

She ignored that. "I stopped being nasty, but I continued to write paragraphs about you. I had to keep you in the limelight and I had to keep you a little bit mad. If I hadn't done that, you might be headed back to the mines instead of going to —" Her voice stopped.

"Where?" he asked eagerly.

She was silent for so long a time that he did not think she was going to answer. "All right," she said at last, "I'll tell you. You're going to Jersey City."

He drew a deep breath. "On the level?"

"On the level, Luke." It was the first time she had used his name.

"Thanks, Jackie." It was the first time he had used hers.

"And I'll tell you something else: I don't build up a promising ballplayer just to see him stop at an AA league."

Suddenly he was grinning. What a day this had turned out to be! He stood up and prepared to help her to her feet.

At that moment Hec Turner's voice came from the other end of the pool. "Hold it, pal. Stay there and wait

for me." The shortstop came along the concrete side. "Did Jackie tell you you were going to Jersey City?"

"Yes."

"That's out."

Luke felt something drain from him. He might have known it was too good to be true.

"It can't be out," Jackie cried. "I had it straight from Bertha."

"Something happened half an hour ago," Hec said quietly, "that has changed everything. Eddie Horne played tennis with you, didn't he? After the match he came to the country club. Somebody sliced a shot and the ball struck him in the head. They've rushed him to a hospital and they're X-raying him now, but the doctors know it's a fracture. They won't know how bad until after they see the pictures, but he's going to be out for a long time. That puts the club in a spot. If they could call Stan Fox back and give him what he wants —"

"Why can't they?" Luke asked.

"It happens that they traded Stan to the Lions an hour before Eddie's accident."

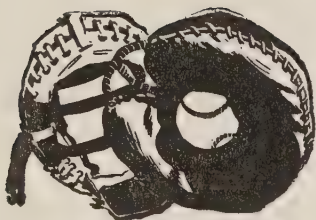
From off in the distance came the faint sound of an automobile horn.

"Pal," said Hec, "you're not going to Jersey City because you're staying with the Buffs. You're filling Eddie Horne's shoes." He walked away and turned to call back: "I'm sorry for Eddie, but — well, I guess you know what I mean. Good luck, pal." He kept walking and disappeared through the trees.

An inner voice was talking to Luke: "It's a big step from an amateur team to Buff Field, but don't make Johnny Hill's mistake. Don't be afraid of it. Grab it and make good."

“Jackie,” he said, his throat tight, “I was bluffing when I made that date for Buff Field. I never really expected to make it. Now it’s all coming through. Don’t forget, we have that date.”

“I’ll be there,” said Jackie Brannigan.



## CHAPTER

17

Opening Day at Buff Field!

Opening Day, with sixty

thousand rooters in the stands, and Mousey Maynard tantalizing the snapping Wolves with his knuckler, and Shag Henderson throwing his blazing fast one past the Buffs. Opening Day, and four scoreless innings already down in the league records and Luke Coss, on this Opening Day, sitting on the Buff bench with a knot in his stomach that would not loosen.

Through the first three innings Mousey and Henderson had been supreme. Three up and three down. Mousey's knuckler had danced toward the batters with perfect control and Shag's speed had thus far been unhittable. And yet the crowd, the crazy crowd, acted as though this game was terrific. Every ball or strike brought forth a yell, and the yells became shrieks with the start of every play. The bedlam shook Luke's nerves and the packed stands took away his breath. There had been days at the training camp when he had felt this same knot, but today's knot was harder and tighter.

Sixty thousand rooters crashing their clamor out upon the field! Johnny Hill was among them — good old Johnny — and his mother, and Miss Ellison, and a delega-



tion from his home town. After the regulars had had their fielding drill and the utility men had taken over, the home-town crowd had given him a send-off as he ran out to short. It had sounded fine, but it hadn't really meant anything except home-town loyalty. He'd warm the bench for many weeks until Eddie Horne came back — if Eddie did come back. And if Eddie was through with the game, someday he might be thrown in there and then it would be up to him. Provided, of course, the club didn't pick up an experienced player from some other club and send him to Jersey City.

Hank Mooney called for time out and sat down on the third-base bag to take a pebble from his shoe. Luke shifted his position on the bench. With the game halted, he continued to think of Eddie. The infielder wasn't sure that he'd ever again wear a Buff uniform.

"I think I'm through," he'd said the last time Luke had visited him. "I've proved I can stick with a major-league club. In baseball I'd only last so many years and then it would be medicine. I've made up my mind to that. Why waste those years? Don't waste yours, Luke. For you baseball will be fun, but it wouldn't last too long. Study in the off season. Get to college."

Luke was sure he knew a redhead who'd like that. He would too.

Mooney was on his feet and time was in. The restless stands began to yell again. Two were out in the first half of the fourth and Mousey had two strikes and a ball on the batter. The pitcher threw a soft change of pace and the batter swung and missed. A fourth "0" went up for the Wolves on the scoreboard.

The Buffs came running in to the bench, talking it up, shaking out the pepper.

"How about getting me a run?" Mousey demanded, "just so I'll feel better?"

"Make it two runs," chirped Peck, the second baseman, "and we'll all feel better."

Hec, the lead-off man in the Buffs' fourth, went up to the plate. Nick Horsaf, who would follow him, stood in front of the bench swinging two bats.

Luke rubbed his hands together and called: "Come on, Hec; hit one. Get it started."

Hec lined the first pitch over second for a solid single.

The noise from the stands deepened. Nick was at the plate and now it was Mooney who was swinging two bats in front of the bench. The Wolves expected Nick to bunt, but Luke had seen the signal that had been flashed from Denny Hays to the third-base coach and from the coach to the batter. Nick was going to hit away.

Luke held his breath. In a tight, squeaker game you played for one run, but Denny was going to cross the Wolves and play for a big inning.

Henderson blazed a fast one toward the plate, high, hard, and close, a tough pitch to bunt. Guarding against the bunt the third baseman came tearing in. Nick, swinging, rammed one at his feet. The third baseman managed to get his glove on the ball but could not hold it and it rolled away. Hec was safe on second and Nick was safe on first.

The Buffs had their first chance to score.

Uproar and racket poured from the stands as Mooney stepped into the batter's box. The Wolves were plainly uncertain. Mooney might be up there to hit or he might have been instructed to bunt.

Luke had seen the sign and knew it would be a bunt.

It was a bad bunt, tapped too hard. It rolled too far and

Henderson scooped it up, whirled, and threw to Garza — the same Garza who had clashed with Luke in the pre-season game — for a force-out. Nick had come in with a rolling slide, hoping to break up the double play, but Garza leaped high and got off the throw. It was a wide throw and pulled the first baseman off the bag, and it looked for a moment as though Mooney would be safe. Then, suddenly, Mooney slowed, and the first baseman beat him to the bag. Hec was on third, but the heart had been pulled out of a promising attack.

A voice on the bench said, "There it is — that ankle."

Seconds later Hec was caught off third on a snap throw from the catcher and the scoring chance was gone.

The stands sounded as though all the din had been strangled.

Luke watched Mooney with a pang of sympathy. This might be the beginning of the end for a man who had been a great ballplayer. Standing in the batter's box, waiting for a ball to bunt, he had not seemed able to distribute his weight properly on his feet, and now there was an almost imperceptible limp as he moved around third base.

The Buffs got to Shag in the fifth, sixth, and seventh, but couldn't score. Round, white O's continued to go up on the scoreboard.

All at once Luke was conscious of a change — the Buffs were no longer spilling pepper from the bench. Again the Wolves went out one-two-three in the eighth and the team came in quietly for it's turn at bat. The loudmouthed Mousey had also become quiet. He still had his jig ball under control. The Wolves were breaking their backs trying to hit it and Mousey had ceased to kid them and yell back at them.

Luke knew that Mousey was pitching a great game. He wondered why nobody spoke of it, why nobody patted his back.

“How many hits have they got?” he asked suddenly.

Talk broke out along the bench, hurried and high-pitched. Hec said, “Push over, pal,” and elbowed him roughly. Luke looked up in surprise. Nobody had answered his question.

Nothing to nothing, and the Buffs coming up for the last half of the eighth.

Luke knew that something had to crack; the pressure couldn't go on forever. He had lost all awareness of the uproar coming out of the circling, double-decked stands, of the Opening Day flags and bunting. The tight spot had loosened because he had forgotten it. Leaning forward a bit, his lips parted, he absorbed every movement of Hec's, every movement of the Wolves' shortstop. Why had Hec shushed him roughly on the bench? Mousey was pitching a honey of a game, a steadier game than Henderson was hurling. Three times they'd rattled Henderson with hits, but the hits hadn't come at the right time and the Wolves' pitcher had escaped without damage.

“This is one of those days,” Kenny Smith was writing in the press box, “when the Buffs probably wouldn't be able to buy a run with all the gold in Fort Knox.”

In the eighth Shag ran into more trouble. His first pitch nicked a batter's shoulder and he walked the second man. Two on and none out.

Luke was remembering all the scoring chances that had been missed, all the runners left on bases.

And then Garza messed up a double-play ball from Mousey's bat and the bases were filled.

The stands, subdued because of the Buffs' failures to

score, awoke. This time the din carried a wild, sustained note. The Wolves' bull pen broke out in activity for the first time. The Buffs' bench began to boil.

This was the long-awaited break — this was it! Hec and Nick Horsaf and Hank Mooney were coming up.

Part of the infield gathered around Shag, and the manager came out from the bench. Presently he went back — Shag was going to stay in. The pitching veteran — a scarred, seasoned campaigner — seemed to be the calmest man on the field. He went to the resin bag, juggled the ball in his glove, bent to catch his catcher's sign, and began to throw to Hec.

The first ball, a curve, broke off sharply but missed the corner by a hair.

The roar became bedlam.

The next one came knee-high. Hec teed off, but the ball popped high over the infield.

One out!

The frenzy began to thin.

Nick was up. He was a line-drive, ground-ball hitter, and the infield came halfway in, ready for a double play or a play at the plate.

"Hughie!" Denny Hays called sharply. "Run for Kerry."

Kerry, an outfielder who played against righthanders and was not too fast, was on third. Hughie was a speed ball. Hughie might score on a hit on which Kerry would be thrown out.

Nick, cool and patient, jockeyed around at the plate. He took two balls, a strike, and another ball. The next pitch was fat. He swung and drove the ball right at the pitcher.

The roar of the crowd became delirious. Here was the ball game. Here was a drive tagged to go right through

the infield.

Shag's glove went up instinctively to protect his face. The drive hit the glove and dropped to the ground almost at his feet. Baird, who had hung up momentarily in case the ball stuck in the glove, dashed desperately for the plate.

But the delay had made even a speed ball's speed ineffective. Shag recovered fast, pounced on the ball, and threw to his catcher. The ball was waiting for Hughie when he slid in.

Luke had been on his feet with the whole bench, yelling and shouting. The jubilation turned to beefing and wailing. Nick had been robbed. Nick's drive had had "hit" stamped all over it and Shag's glove had gone up only in self-defense.

Hank Mooney was due to hit, but he had stopped on his way to the plate and was looking back questioningly toward the bench. A conference was going on in the corner where Denny Hays sat.

"Luke!" the manager called.

The uproar from the stands had choked, but the fans were still seething.

"Pal," said Hec's voice, "wake up. Denny's calling you."

Luke swung around. "Yes, sir."

Denny Hays said, "Bat for Mooney."





## CHAPTER

18

There wasn't a sound from the bench as Luke walked toward the bat rack. The bat boy held out a bat and he shook his head.

"Try this one," Mooney called to him and held out the bat he had intended to use.

Luke took it and it felt right. Mooney, walking a little slowly, his head down, went toward the obscurity of the dugout. It must be tough, Luke thought, to know you've seen your best days and are coming to the end. The whole team realized that Hank was in a slump and the third baseman knew it. His ankle was kicking up and he wouldn't beat out a close one; he couldn't set himself properly in the batter's box.

"Hold it, kid," a voice called to Luke.

Denny emerged from the dugout and laid a hand on Luke's arm. "He's losing his stuff and getting wild. Make him put it in there. Try for a walk. Anything to get on."

Luke went toward the plate. There was a lull from the stands. They didn't know this player coming up to hit. Some of them got the number on his back and identified him from the score card and sound began to grow. The loud-speaker said: "Attention, please; attention, please.

Coss batting for Mooney.”

All at once the stands were on their feet. This was the boy they'd read so much about, the lad who'd battled with Garza and held his own with Mousey Maynard. Sound grew and grew. In it was a certain undertone that told they were rooting for this rookie who was coming up for his first time at bat in the big league and coming up in the pinch.

Luke heard none of the turmoil. Even before stepping into the batter's box his eyes had focused on Shag. All the rest of the world was blotted out. The chorus of sixty thousand voices had become background like the music of a motion picture.

“Well, well,” said the Wolves' catcher, “if it isn't the celebrated Coal Mine Kid. Too bad they sent you up for the first time against a pitcher like Shag.” He turned his head and yelled at the Buff bench, “Thanks, Denny.”

Because of his experience with Mousey, Luke recognized the technique. The catcher was using the needle, jockeying him. He tried to close his ears to the sneering voice.

The umpire brushed the plate. At sight of his blue coat Luke remembered Bill Jenkins. Watch the strike zone and watch the ball all the way until he could read the label!

Shag Henderson's smile was a smile of confidence — a smile that said this would be easy.

Luke recognized it for more jockeying. He took position at the rear of the box, the Hornsby stance.

The first one came in waist-high. It could be a strike. Luke wanted to swing, but the ball was curving and might go outside. He had been told to wait. He waited.

“Ball one.”

The catcher turned, protesting that the pitch had

caught the outside corner. Boos came from the stands from those who were rooting for the Wolves.

The umpire brushed the plate again.

Shag hadn't liked the decision. He glowered. Luke edged a trifle closer to the plate.

The next pitch came at his head and he went to the dirt.

"Ball two."

Now the Buff fans, recalling the training camp riot, were booing. But Luke didn't think Shag was really trying to hit him. He had a sudden picture of Eddie Horne in a hospital bed, his head heavily bandaged. Perhaps that's what Shag wanted him to remember.

The next one was plainly marked "strike zone." Luke held his fire. No sign had come from the bench changing his instructions.

"Strike one."

Luke dug in. Shag had control of his curve. If the next one came for the outside corner, he would have to take his cut. He couldn't let the count go to two-and-two; he'd have only another strike left. He edged closer. He wanted to get plenty of wood on an outside curve if it came in fast.

It was coming, and it would be a strike. Luke followed the seams. He saw it begin to curve. His whole body went into the motion as he went after the pitch.

The sound of bat meeting ball sang to him. The shock that ran up his arm felt good. A sea of clamor — he heard it now — swept him on toward first. The first-base coach was waving him along. He swung toward second and, as he did so, caught an umpire's arms beginning to wave the sign for a foul. He looked up. The ball had gone into the second deck of the right-field stands, foul by a few feet.

Luke went back and picked up his bat. The crowd groaned.

A bleacher voice, faint and faraway, cried: "Give it another ride, Coal Mine! You've got what it takes."

It grew on Luke that he had almost hit a home run with the bases full. *Almost*. He knew why the ball had gone foul. He had waited a trifle too long, studied the seams a trifle too long, swung a trifle too late, and had not been fast enough with his wrists.

The catcher was halfway down the pitching fairway talking to Shag. Luke could guess what they'd be saying — that one had been too close for comfort. They wouldn't try that pitch again — or would they?

"Don't guess — wait until it comes up." That's what they'd all told him, repeating it over and over. But how could you help thinking and guessing?

Something in Shag's look, something in the catcher's eye as he came back —

If they were going to throw at him again in the hopes of frightening him and making him a sucker for the next pitch, the three-two pitch — He edged a little closer to the plate. It had to be his nerve or Shag's.

The ball came right at him. It had the look of a curve that might break outside fast. It might catch the outside corner or it might not break at all and keep coming right at him. Instead of going into the dirt he forced himself to stand there, his bat poised.

The ball didn't break. At the last moment he rolled away from it, but it struck his upper arm. It hurt and he did go into the dirt.

The umpire waved him toward first.

The stands were raving as the runner came over from third, forced in by a hit batsman. The catcher was shout-

ing at the umpire, "He let it hit him." Shag was storming toward the plate, the Wolves' manager was running from the bench, and the infield was rushing in.

Luke was still in the dirt and Willie Herman was bending over him, rubbing his arm. The trainer yelled at Shag, "You tried to dust him off." His voice dropped. "You've got the nerve, Luke. It took nerve to stand there and get hit with that pitch."

Luke got up and walked to first, stretching his arm. The argument at the plate broke. The bases were still filled. Luke stayed close to the bag, knowing they'd try to pick him off if he took a lead.

The next batter struck out on three pitched balls, ending the inning.

Luke ran toward the dugout. He'd been sent up to hit and now he'd warm the bench again. But he'd brought in a run.

Denny Hays met him. "Luke," he said, "I'm shifting Hec to third for the first half of the ninth. Play short."

That was all. "Luke, play short."

It never occurred to Luke to wonder why he, the rawest rookie, was sent to short, why the great Hec Turner was shifted to third.

But the crowd wondered as Hec went toward third and the murmur in the stands became a protest. And then all at once it changed. The manager must have played a hunch in sending up the Coal Mine Kid to hit; he might be playing a lucky hunch now. And then too this was the kid from the mines who had taken the fancy of the sports writers. The old urge for the underdog came out of the stands in a changing welter of sound.

Hec said: "O.K., pal. Play this guy near second — and not too deep. He's fast."



Mousey took plenty of time. There was a changed hush over the crowd as he juggled the ball, a dramatic hush. The first two were wide. The next was a called strike — the next was a line drive to center field, but right at Spud Perkins.

“Two to go,” Hec yelled in the infield pepper.

Garza was up. “Play him straight away,” Hec said.

Garza walked on four pitched balls, and another batter came to the plate.

Mousey fiddled with his cap and with his belt. Hec went in to quiet him down, came back to Luke.

“Over nearer me, pal. If it’s a slow ball, throw to first; fast one, try for two. If he tries to steal, Peck will take the throw.”

Luke followed Hec’s advice. This left a wide gap at short, but Hec knew how to play the hitters. Training camp advice came back to him: “Think only of the next play and what you’ll do.”

Mousey threw two more balls, and then a blazing strike. But the batter was waiting it out.

The count went to three and one.

The next one had to be in there. Luke, on his toes, knew that the batter would swing if the pitch was good.

The batter connected and the ball bounded toward the gaping hole at short. Luke took off and speared it. The momentum swung him around. As he straightened, he saw that he was too late for the force of Garza at second. With a quaking knowledge that he had blown the double play he rifled the ball to first.

The throw was in time, but wide. The runner was safe; now there were men on first and second.

The stands were held in a strange hush. Luke saw that Mousey and the infielders were watching the scoreboard.



An "E" for error came up on the electric board. The hush was broken by another roar that seemed to hold a breathless relief.

"Thanks, Shortstop," Mousey yelled.

Luke didn't get it. The play had been a hard chance, but he should have thrown out the batter. Was Mousey sarcastic?

Hec was talking. "Nice try, pal. My fault. Play this guy deep, close to the bag. Try for two, at second and first."

Mousey picked up pebbles and kicked at the dirt.

Garza was yelling at the pitcher, trying to rattle him, taking a long lead off second. Luke got the signal for the pitchout and sneaked behind the runner toward the bag. Garza, warned by the third-base coach, got back in time, bumped Luke, and tried to upset him.

Ignoring him, Luke walked slowly to the mound and handed the ball to the pitcher. "Get in there, Mouse. Stop fooling around."

Mousey gave him a queer look. "You're a cold-blooded fish, Shortstop."

Luke said: "I've got a date at home plate. Remember?"

Mousey's eyes lighted. "Shortstop, this one's for Jackie."

Luke patted the pitcher's arm and trotted back to his position. He wondered why the crowd broke loose.

Mousey did get the next one over.

And at once it roared back, exactly in the groove Hec had expected, but it looked to be an unplayable ball, a screaming base hit, a low liner that would bring in the tying run.

Luke didn't know it was supposed to be a base hit. It was a ball to be played. Two steps and his feet left the ground as he dove headlong to his left. The ball stuck in

his frantically reaching glove.

Garza, trapped, tore back toward second. Peck Wilson was already there. Luke's underhand toss to the second baseman was true.

Peck, holding the ball high, ran toward Mousey. The pitcher was running toward Luke. Luke found himself almost brought to the ground as Mousey leaped upon him and smacked him on both cheeks. The other players were around them, whooping and pounding backs.

Denny Hays came out of the dugout and bore down upon the group, his face beaming.

"How do you like this rookie, Denny?" Mousey yelled.

"I like him," Denny said. He shook hands with the pitcher and held out his hand to Luke.

Luke wondered if they were all going crazy. It was simply the end of a ball game, wasn't it? There'd be a lot more ball games before the season was over. Abruptly he grew conscious of an ovation pouring out of the stands and of the gathering press photographers.

"Know what he said to me, Denny?" The Mouse was still yelling.

"Whatever it was, it was all right."

"‘Stop fooling around,’ he says to me — and the old Mouse with his first no-hitter on the fire!"

Luke stared and slowly his mouth fell open. "Was — was that a no-hitter?"

"If it wasn't," Mousey yodeled happily, "don't nobody wake me up!" He waved to the cameramen. "Just a minute, boys, and I'll be with you."

Police and park attendants were moving the team toward the safety of the bench. Luke, still filled with amazement, walked beside Hec Turner.

"Nobody said anything about a no-hitter," he said

weakly. "Not a word."

"Nobody ever does," Hec was serious. "Talk about it and you put a whammy on it."

"Was that the reason you elbowed me and shut me up?"

The shortstop nodded. "You don't fool around with a whammy, pal."

Luke's hand still stung from the impact of the liner that had ended the game. And a question that had not bothered him before became an astounding question now.

"Hec, why did Denny send me out to play short and move you to third?"

"Common sense," said Hec. "He had a problem; should he call up a utility infielder from a farm club or deal with a major-league club for a player? Would you be strong enough insurance? Today's game was today's game, but the problem could nag him all season. He had to find out something about you, pal. Well, I guess he found out."

A group had come out of the stands — Luke's mother, Johnny Hill and Miss Ellison, Mrs. Brannigan and Jacqueline. Jacqueline was walking with his mother. Johnny looked as though this were another Christmas.

"Let those people through," Denny Hays told the police escort.

Mousey, his cap cocked jauntily, had strutted off to one side and was posing for the photographers. Sixty thousand fans were moving out of the stands, out of the park, still excited, still talking of the no-hitter.

Then his mother's arms were around Luke, and Johnny Hill was trying to talk and couldn't, and Miss Ellison was holding Johnny's arm and looking as though this were Christmas for her too.

Mrs. Brannigan was beaming. "Luke, Mike would be

proud of you today. Won't you come up for dinner tonight — all of you — all your party? ”

Jacqueline stood behind her mother. “Luke,” she said, “you were wonderful.” They had a date at home plate, and she'd come out of the stands to keep it, but she was plainly embarrassed.

All at once Luke understood. Players, police, ground keepers, ushers surrounded them. Thousands were still looking on from emptying stands. What was between them was not for the public.

“Not here, Jackie,” he said in a voice that only she heard. “Later.”

Her eyes thanked him.

Mrs. Brannigan was speaking again. “I have a car outside that will hold all of us. Luke can join us after he's dressed.” She started for an exit.

Luke's hand went up to a redhead. “Be seeing you.”

“I'll be waiting.” This was something that only he heard.

He disappeared into the dugout and went through a door into a runway that led under the stands to the clubhouse. His hand still tingled, and in memory he had begun to relive the glorious sound of sixty thousand cheering fans. Deep within him was the belated fire of today's game, today's achievement. Life was good. Eddie Horne was right — it wouldn't last long, but it would be good while it lasted. Baseball was a game for youth. He'd remember that it came to an end; Hank Mooney had reached the beginning of the end today. Of one thing he was certain, when it did end, he'd be ready for something else. He'd study; he'd get to college; he'd get his teeth into a profession. And someday — His thoughts were warmly with a redhead who had ridden with him on a bus.

He heard footsteps behind him and turned his head.  
“Thanks, Hec.”

Hec pretended surprise. “For what?”

“For everything,” said Luke. Tonight he’d thank Johnny Hill. He knew he’d made it. Hec had said so, and Hec wouldn’t fool him. He belonged.

He climbed the clubhouse stairway. A sign on a locker said, “COSS.” Down in the runway he could hear the approaching Mousey bellowing a song. The sound was good. Good old Mousey, good old world. He’d left the coal mines forever. It had been a rough, uphill road. He was what Johnny and Hec had told him he would be — a big-leaguer.











(Continued from front flap)

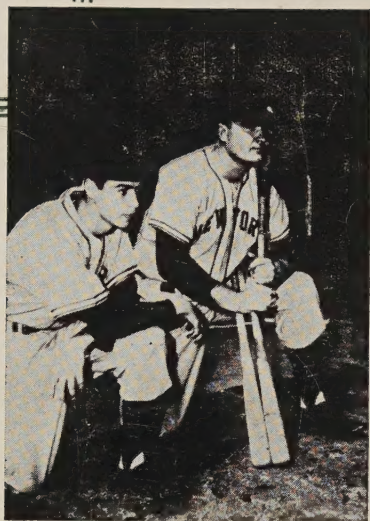
writers, tells the dramatic tale of a big-league training camp as it has never been told before. Here are the hopes and the despairs that are part of every spring training camp; the suspense and tension of an uphill fight; the breaks that can help or damage; the veterans struggling as desperately to hold their jobs as the rookies are battling to take them; the sweat and the toil that build the starting line-up for Opening Day.

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## About the Author

FRANCIS WALLACE, well known for his "Pigskin Preview" which appeared annually in *The Saturday Evening Post*, has written twelve books, six of which have been made into movies. His best-known book is *Kid Galahad*. A radio commentator, sports writer, and newspaper man, Mr. Wallace was president of the National Notre Dame Alumni Association in 1949. He is an associate editor of *Collier's*, is interested in politics and economics, and is a member of many clubs and organizations. His home is in Bellaire, Ohio, but his radio, newspaper, and magazine activities take him all over the country.



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professional ball club*

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